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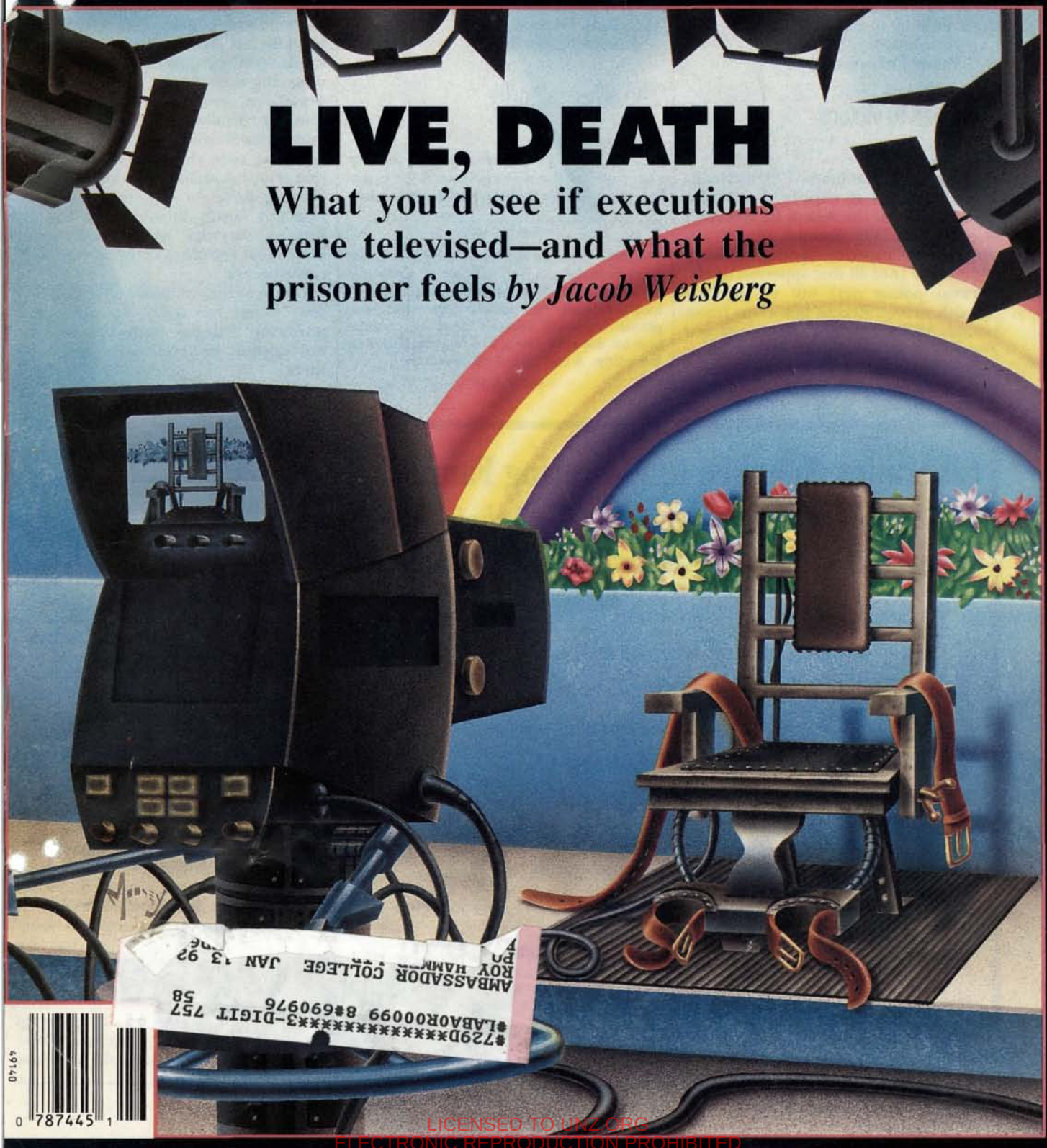

LIVE, DEATH

What you'd see if executions were televised—and what the prisoner feels *by Jacob Weisberg*

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CORRESPONDENCE

A little respect

To the editors:

Regarding Martin Peretz's "Unpromised Lands" (June 3): The Kurds can expect no help from us until they have gunned down some bathers at the beach, or blown up a few airliners. So far they have done nothing to earn our respect.

NEIL AMENT
Wasco, California

Pathogen to victory

To the editors:

Paul Berman's attempt ("Aztecs and Iraqis" May 27) to explain the annihilating defeat of the Aztecs by semiotics is misguided. The Spanish victory was due not to superior Spanish military technology (not all that superior, as Mr. Berman points out) but to superior Spanish viruses. Recent historians (most notably William McNeill in *Plagues and Peoples* and Alfred Crosby in *The Columbian Exchange* and *Ecological Imperialism*) have documented the genocidal devastation wreaked on aboriginal peoples by Old World pathogens, smallpox especially. The Aztecs could not follow up their defeat of Cortés (the *Noche Trist*) because they were paralyzed by smallpox; both the Aztec and Incan command structures were decimated by pestilence.

That Amerindian armies were wiped out by dumb viruses, rather than smart bombs (as in Iraq), of course, should not be surprising. This is, after all, the first century in human history in which fewer soldiers died of disease than in battle.

DAVID DREWER
Dundalk, Maryland

The other minority

To the editors:

In your May 20 Notebook, you discuss the case of the Georgetown University law student who faced possible expulsion for pointing out the discrepancy between the credentials of admitted black law students and admitted white law students. This example is only the most recent in a growing list of examples in which students, faculty, and administrators have faced serious consequences, including termination of their positions, for stating politically incorrect facts. Any faculty member who has served on student admission committees, fellowship award committees, or faculty recruitment committees knows that there are large and expanding preferences based solely on race and sex. Any faculty member who has received streams of memoranda from university administrators announcing new courses, multiculturalism workshops, sensitivity workshops, or requesting detailed information on the multicultural content of existing courses, including even chemistry courses, notes that multiculturalism is a dominant and growing force on university campuses. And any faculty member who has expressed concerns about these issues knows that ostracism or worse is a likely consequence.

Clearly, Michael Kinsley ("P.C. B.S.," TRB) either has not been close to a university campus recently, or has not opened his eyes when he's been there.

RICHARD EBRIGHT
New Brunswick, New Jersey
(Via 900 number)

The writer is assistant professor of chemistry at Rutgers University.

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Hacks for facts

To the editors:

Mickey Kaus writes in "Facts for Hacks" (May 20): " '*Average weekly earnings in America today are lower than they were in the last week that Dwight Eisenhower was president.*' If this stat-bite from Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan is true, the country's really gone to hell. But it isn't true. Moynihan uses data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for 'production and nonsupervisory workers.' The BLS survey is screwy, in part because it has been measuring a smaller and smaller segment of the labor force as the economy shifts to white-collar work."

Sorry. The BLS Average Weekly Earnings survey includes just about everybody working outside the public sector. It includes Mr. Kaus and his more fortunate, or necessitous, classmates working as junior associates in what are known as high-powered Washington law firms. This data series goes back to 1947, about the same time the federal government began a monthly report on unemployment rates. Together, these were the numbers that told you how

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well workers were doing. In 1960 Average Weekly Earnings covered 84 percent of workers on private payrolls. In 1990 it covered 81 percent. In constant (1982) dollars, the average weekly earning in 1960 was $261.92. In 1990 it was $259.58. Ergo, "the country's really gone to hell."

DANIEL P. MOYNIHAN
Washington, D.C.

The writer is U.S. senator from New York.

To the editors:

Mickey Kaus takes me to task for concluding that some two-thirds of the huge 1977-90 shift in after-tax income toward the richest 1 percent can be attributed to the decline in the progressivity of the federal tax code over that period. Let me respond.

First, Mr. Kaus dismisses as "hypothetical" my comparison of the taxes the rich now pay to what they would owe if the tax law were as progressive as it was in 1977. Well, yes, this is a hypothetical comparison, since the tax law did not stay as progressive as it used to be. But that's precisely my point.

Two, Mr. Kaus says that in measuring the cumulative effect of the 1977-90 tax changes, I assume that "the rich invested their tax cuts." Actually, I simply argue that a *portion* of the tax cuts led to increased wealth and investment earnings for the rich. To be sure, if you believe that the rich spent every single penny of their $860 billion in 1977-90 tax cuts, then the decline in tax progressivity explains "only" half the shift in after-tax income in favor of the richest 1 percent. But such a zero-wealth-effect theory is implausible. (For one thing, most of the increased pre-tax income going to the richest 1 percent from 1977 to 1990 was increased investment income.) Under any set of more plausible assumptions, e.g., that the rich saved a fifth of their tax cuts and earned a 20 percent rate of return, or that they saved half and earned 12 percent, or whatever, the tax cuts explain about two-thirds of the shift.

ROBERT S. MCINTYRE
Washington, D.C.

The writer is director of Citizens for Tax Justice.

To the editors:

Mr. Kaus contends that the statement "Approximately 64 percent of all poor children—or nearly two of every three—live in families with one or more workers" (from a 1989 report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities) is "designed to shock voters who think the poor don't work." The statement is misleading because "it counts someone as a 'worker' even if he works only a day or two a year. Unfortunately, many people don't work much more than that .... Only 25 percent are families where the total work effort adds up to thirty-five hours a week."

The center's report did note that nearly two-thirds of poor children live in a family with a worker. But this observation is *immediately* followed by a statement that *one-sixth* of poor children live in a family with a full-time, year-round worker. No reader of the report could draw the conclusion that most poor families with a worker worked full-time throughout the year.

Moreover, the report, entitled *Making Work Pay*, argues *not* that lack of work isn't a problem but rather that work among the poor should be encouraged and more amply rewarded. The report's first page states its central theme: "If a parent works *full-time, year-round*, the parent and his or her children should not have to live in poverty" (emphasis added). The report calls for two policy changes: a substantial expansion in the earned income tax credit for low-income working families with children and a moderate increase in the minimum wage. These policies are of virtually no value to families that work little, if at all.

ROBERT GREENSTEIN
Washington, D.C.

The writer is executive director of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

To the editors:

Mickey Kaus unfairly questioned the integrity of the Food Research & Action Center's recently released childhood hunger survey and the motivations of those conducting and funding it. The purpose of our study—the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project, or CCHIP—was to help community groups scientifically document the problem of childhood hunger in their communities. Yes, FRAC and the groups conducting CCHIP studies are advocacy organizations. That is why we went to great pains to develop an impeccable study and hired an independent researcher to conduct it. We object to the implication that because we care about an issue we lack the integrity to conduct a careful study.

Contrary to Mr. Kaus's assertions, our questions, which were carefully pretested in a pilot study and tested again in an extensive demonstration project, did measure objective facts about the low-income families surveyed. Only if families answered yes repeatedly to questions aimed at measuring food shortages due to insufficient resources did we classify them as hungry.

Our major finding—that one child in eight under the age of 12 is hungry—is shocking, but not surprising. One out of five U.S. children lives in poverty. Poverty-level income makes it very difficult to meet even the bare necessities of life. The numbers of poor and hungry children in the United States should be of great concern to all of us.

ROBERT J. FERSH
Washington, D.C.

The writer is executive director of the Food Research & Action Center.

Mickey Kaus responds:

I admit I didn't realize that the BLS survey Senator Moynihan cites covers most service-sector workers, including some doctors and lawyers, as well as most workers in goods-producing firms. But the survey still isn't a reliable yardstick, because (as I wrote) it *has* been measuring a smaller and smaller portion of the workforce. In 1964 it covered 76 percent of workers in goods-producing industries. Now it covers only 70 percent. In service industries it covers 85 percent, down from 89 percent. Why? Because more workers are now classified as "supervisors" (or as "nonproduction" professional and white-collar types). These tend to be the best-paid workers. Leaving out an increasing number of workers at the top of the wage scale, as the BLS survey does, would skew the remaining average downward even if nobody's real wages changed at all. Yes, the typical American worker hasn't gained much over the past two decades. But we're not back to the 1950s.

Like Senator Moynihan, Mr. McIntyre exaggerates a genuine, disturbing trend. Tax cuts do explain a chunk of the increased income share of the richest 1 percent—but not two-thirds of it. Mr. McIntyre magnifies his number in a variety of ways. For example, he assumes that the 1977 tax code would have been allowed to claim an ever-higher share of national income, raising more than half a trillion dollars more than was actually raised between 1977 and 1990. *All* of this extra revenue would come from the top 1 percent, as their rising incomes pushed them into higher brackets. If instead you assume the government would have raised the same amount of money that it did raise—but done it as progressively as in '77—Mr. McIntyre's "two-thirds" figure falls dramatically.

Also, in 1977 corporate profits were at record highs, and (because taxes on profits fall heavily on the rich) tax progressivity was at a record high. Mr. McIntyre assumes this record progressivity would have prevailed in all subsequent years even though *under the '77 code itself* progressivity would have been lower because corporate profits fell.

Finally, he assumes that all the extra money he'd raise from the top 1 percent would find its way into the pockets of the other 99 percent. How? If it would have been rebated to them, he's testing a code that's much *more*

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Keiretsuphobia

You don't hear much about MITI anymore. For a while, Tokyo's Ministry of International Trade and Industry was more widely feared in America than the Kremlin (and this was when the Kremlin was still the Kremlin). MITI was said to be the central government authority directing Japan's diabolical plot to take over the world one industry at a time. Well, MITI is still there, doing whatever evil it did before. But it has been replaced in the anti-Japanese demonology by an even more diabolical organism: the keiretsu.

Keiretsu (same word, singular or plural) are networks or families of corporations. There are "horizontal" keiretsu, spanning several industries and generally organized around a bank, and "vertical" keiretsu, composed of a major industrial corporation and its suppliers in a particular industry. Toyota, for example, heads an auto industry keiretsu. Through interlocking directorates, share-holdings, and simple buying power, Toyota dominates its family of parts manufacturers.

As I was struggling to explain the alarm over keiretsu to a *New Republic* editorial meeting last week, "It's a gigantic conspiracy to . . . to . . . to . . ."

"To build cars?" suggested the editor helpfully.

Exactly.

Keiretsu are said to have roots in the ancient relationship between feudal landlords—daimyo—and their samurai, and also in the huge industrial combines—zaibatsu—that built the Japanese war machine of the first half of this century, which MacArthur naively thought he had dismantled. And companies like Toyota are now said to be importing this un-American concept, with its associated blizzard of foreign words, into the United States, when they open plants here and form relationships with American suppliers.

In the *Harvard Business Review* last winter, the founder of a Japanese supplier described the nightmare of life inside a keiretsu: "I went to the president of this big company, not to demand my freedom but to profess my sincere desire to support his company's growth. . . . 'Your words are like an expression of affection from an ugly woman,' he answered. . . . My loyalty was taken for granted." Well!

T. Boone Pickens, the legendary Texas self-publicist, has done the most to spread keiretsu alarm. Two years ago he acquired a 26 percent interest in a Toyota headlight supplier. The company, Koito, would not put him on its board or provide him information that, he said, would expose the evils of the keiretsu system. Recently he announced he was giving up in despair and disposing of his stock.

In fact, as Koito had alleged all along, it came out a few months ago that Pickens never really owned the stock. The Japanese financial sharpster who had "sold" it to him had also loaned him the money and guaranteed him against loss. It was all part of a scheme to create so much noise that Toyota would buy the shares back at a premium ("greenmail," it's called). But the sharpster suffered other reversals and needed his shares back. That, not despair over keiretsu, is what led Boone to abandon his quest.

As with other allegedly nefarious Japanese practices—trade protectionism, MITI itself—the critics of keiretsu don't make clear whether they think this is an outrage that ought to be eliminated or a brilliant stroke that ought to be copied. "Keiretsu is a great part of Japan's economic success," writes Pickens. "It reinforces Japan's stable business environment, providing corporate managers with the time and capital to plan for the long term." If so, why fear the arrival of keiretsu in America? Because "keiretsu fits the classic definition of . . . business monopolies. Suppliers become captives. Worker freedom is restricted. And consumers pay more."

Consumers pay more? Wait a minute. A main accusation against keiretsu is that they enable a Toyota to squeeze its suppliers and unfairly undercut American rivals. That means consumers pay less. Meanwhile the Federal Trade Commission is investigating whether Japanese companies with American plants discriminate against American suppliers in favor of their keiretsu-mates back home. But if being a "captive supplier" is so awful, why complain about being left out? Boone's objection, as a shareholder of Koito, was that Toyota was screwing him.

And then there's a consulting firm study of keiretsu in America, financed by Pickens, which raises yet another contradictory worry: that "Japanese automobile manufacturers could induce low-cost Japanese auto parts suppliers in their respective keiretsu systems to refuse to sell to U.S. automobile manufacturers." In other words, the system will discriminate *in favor* of American parts manufacturers by denying GM and Ford access to Japanese parts.

Clearly, explanations for keiretsuphobia lie more in the realm of psychology than in the realm of economics. Growing up in Detroit, I several times took the public tour of Ford's great River Rouge plant. The guide would explain how, for maximum efficiency, virtually everything that went into a car was manufactured from scratch on-site. Ford even made the steel right there. Later that kind of thinking went out of fashion. It came to be thought that "contracting out" different bits of the manufacturing process and buying supplies "off the shelf" was more efficient. Who knows? But American companies still do it both ways, and Japanese vertical keiretsu are just a middle way between these two extremes. General Motors still makes far more of its own parts than Toyota buys from "captive" suppliers.

Robert Z. Lawrence of the Brookings Institution has done what is regarded as the most important study of keiretsu in Japan. Are they an efficient method of production, or just a cozy arrangement that blocks opportunity for American suppliers? Lawrence found that keiretsu tend to reduce imports but have no significant effect on exports. From this he reasoned, logically, that keiretsu are an unjustified impediment to trade: if they actually made products more efficiently, they would increase exports as well as reducing imports. So American trade negotiators are right to try to break them open.

That's fine. But a corollary of this logic is that keiretsu are doing Japan no good either. Far from a nefarious plot, they are a foolish archaism. Yet keiretsuphobes don't take that point of view. Indeed, the *Harvard Business Review*, which seems to be developing a specialty in anti-Japanese alarmism, published another article last year on keiretsu, this one urging American and European computer manufacturers to join in a giant keiretsu-style combine with all their suppliers to take on the Japanese. At the same time T. Boone Pickens wants to "use the antitrust laws to prevent Japan from exporting its keiretsu cartels to the U.S."

Are Japan's keiretsu to be envied or to be deplored? Copied or banned? The answer, I think, is none of the above.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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JUN 26 1991

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

JULY 1, 1991

FOUNDED 1914
WASHINGTON, D.C.
ISSUE 3,989

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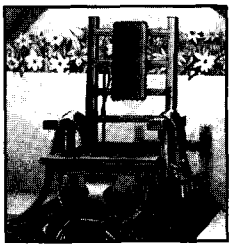

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 205, Number 1, Issue 3,989, July 1, 1991. (Printed in the U.S. on June 12, 1991.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated Jan. 7 & 14, July 15 & 22, Aug. 19 & 26, and Sept. 16 & 23, 1991) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. Leadership Network advertising (212) 684-5500. Yearly subscriptions, $69.97; foreign, $99.97; Canada, $84.97. Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage & handling). ©1991 by The New Republic, Inc. (ISSN 0028-6583). Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, CD-ROM, issue and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscribers: Please send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to Subscription Service Dept., The New Republic, P.O. Box 56515, Boulder, CO 80322. For subscription problems call 800-274-6686.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JULY 1, 1991

BEGGAR'S OPERA

As his fellow countrymen have long understood, there is something willfully obtuse about Mikhail Gorbachev. A large number of his fellow Soviet citizens have concluded that the only hope for their region is a radical break with the past. By radical they mean a familiar—and to Western ears, banal—litany of demands: democratically elected officials, unimpeachable private property, far greater autonomy for the Soviet republics, a massive cut in the still enormous Soviet defense budget. Were Mr. Gorbachev to acquiesce to such a historic break in full—this spring's agreement with nine of the Soviet republics represented only an agreement to it in part—it would surely represent the end of an epoch, and the Soviet leader would merit the kind of assistance that is now being questioned in the capitals of the Western nations.

But Mr. Gorbachev shows as yet few signs of such enlightenment. Indeed, what is remarkable is how tenaciously and vaguely he clings to modes of thought that lie in tatters around him. His speech upon acceptance of his Nobel prize was spectacular proof of this. Instead of setting himself unalterably on the side of radical reform, the Soviet leader both demanded huge handouts from the West and denounced the idea that such help should carry "conditions." He traded on the gratitude he earned in the West three years ago, but no longer earns today. He intoned phrases that had resonance once, but now, in the context of Soviet collapse, have the timbre of almost wistful disengagement.

His actions speak as eloquently as his words. Three and a half billion dollars is still being funneled annually to Cuba. The Red Army is punishing Armenia's resistance to the recent Nine-plus-One agreement with tanks. There is not yet any commitment to the freedom of the Baltic states; indeed, Soviet troops have been firing on Baltic border guards and setting up roadblocks in Vilnius. Instead of proceeding with the radical economic plans proposed by economists Stanislav Shatalin and Grigory Yavlinsky, Mr. Gorbachev's handpicked prime ministers produce "anti-crisis" programs based on centralized government controls and managed price increases. Mr. Gorbachev still avows a belief in some version of "socialism" and refuses to accept the notion of private property.

In the defense realm, Mr. Gorbachev has proposed—and delivered upon—cuts in production, spending, and manpower of between 15 percent and 20 percent. But in the context of the current drain on Soviet resources, what is remarkable about this is how paltry the reductions are. Defense spending now accounts for a third of the Soviet Union's collapsing GNP, as against 5 percent for the United States. The output of the Soviet military machine is still vastly greater than ours, and is beyond any reasonable need of a nation that has supposedly renounced the use of force to settle international disputes. Tank production, for example, has fallen from 3,500 in 1987 to 1,400 in 1990 to an estimated 900 this year. But U.S. tank production last year was 700 and this year will be 500. What does the Soviet Union need 900 new tanks for? Or 5,500 new armored fighting vehicles (compared with 1,200 for the United States), 1,300 artillery pieces (compared with 270 for the United States), and 140 intercontinental ballistic missiles (compared with fourteen for the United States)?

Amazingly, Gorbachev still has a Western audience. It is understandable that the Germans, however short-sightedly, are prepared to go even further into debt to buy off temporarily a mass emigration from the Soviet Union. It is not so clear why the United States has a similarly pressing interest, unless, of course, it is believed that peaceful democratic change hinges upon a promise of economic aid to the current unelected regime. In this regard, it's a sweet irony that many of those who believe that Mr. Gorbachev was alone responsible for democratization in the Soviet Union are the very people who now believe the West is alone responsible for its ultimate success.

The most intellectually honest expression of this position emanates from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. The economist Jeffrey Sachs, who put together Poland's radical economic reform plan, is arguing for $30 billion a year for four years for Moscow, mainly in loans and loan guarantees, from all the Western countries, or about $3 billion in cash per year from the United States. His colleagues Graham Allison and

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Robert Blackwill, in *Foreign Affairs*, call for $15 billion to $20 billion per year in grants over the next three years. The Cambridge proposals, derived from ideas brought to this country by Yavlinsky, would be (as Messrs. Allison and Blackwill put it) "conditional upon continuing political pluralization and a coherent economic program for moving rapidly to a market economy." Mr. Sachs says that aid should also be conditioned on freedom for the Baltics and on deep cuts in Soviet military spending.

In principle, there would be some rationale for a bargain of this sort, if the principles of political pluralization were more explicitly spelled out, if the sums involved were smaller—and if Mr. Gorbachev were committed to his part of the bargain. Aid to Mr. Gorbachev's regime now would have much the same effect as Western loans to Poland did in the 1970s: the money would be wasted, and talk of it would allow a corrupt, despotic regime to think that it could somehow survive without total transformation.

The terms that the United States must set are the ones being used for Poland now: elect a democratic government first. When that government begins to institute an economic conversion plan involving privatization of state-owned industry, elimination of subsidies and price controls, and legalization of private property and private enterprise, then the West will be in a position to talk about a currency-stabilization fund and loans to create a social safety net for jobless workers in need of retraining.

There is, however, a profounder reason for the West to wait for democracy before giving aid, rather than giving aid in order to encourage democracy. It is that for genuine economic and political change to succeed at all, for the costs of it to be accepted and borne, an accountable democratic government is essential. This surely is the lesson of Eastern Europe's slow, painful return to some level of normalcy. There is no way that an unelected government such as Mr. Gorbachev's can effect the sweeping change now needed throughout the Soviet Union, without allowing for peaceful means of popular discontent to find expression. To risk mass unemployment, recession, and deflation for an intangible capitalist future under the present Soviet system is tantamount to inviting violent revolution. It is not surprising that Mr. Gorbachev has balked at the prospect.

But Mr. Gorbachev, mercifully, will soon be an even more irrelevant character than he now is, his rhetoric more archaic, his beliefs more unmistakably anachronistic. The recent Russian elections will, we hope, provide a democratic government with which the West can finally do real and serious business. The other republics will follow, and they should be dealt with independently.

When these democratic entities emerge, it will be clearer why the wait was worthwhile. There is all the difference in the world between negotiating change with unelected apparatchiks and negotiating it with mandate-fresh democrats. The former are hide-bound by their factional interests and supports. The latter, though not free from these restraints, have another base from which to negotiate: their electorate. We can well understand why for domestic political reasons Mr. Gorbachev might not wish to be seen selling his country's foreign policy to the West in return for aid, or designing the Soviet Union's internal structure to suit Western specifications: he has to answer to the KGB and the Red Army for his political survival. But emerging democratic forces will have no such constraint. These leaders—extant and potential—have a critical advantage over Mr. Gorbachev: the advantage of genuine democracy. Because they are elected, they can ask for honest aid in the name of the people they represent, and not in the name of the power-brokers on which they rely. They can ask for aid for democracy, and mean it. And when we aid them, we can be sure we are not also aiding the structures and institutions that still hope to crush them. In cash-straitened times like these, that is not a condition we should be leery of enforcing.

SYRIA'S SINS

The Bush Administration's choice of special friends has long had an element of grotesquery to it. Post-Tiananmen China is the example that springs most readily to mind. But we shouldn't forget that until August 2 of last year, the list also included the two most brutal regimes in the Middle East, brutal not only to their neighbors but to the majority of their own citizens. Iraq subsequently walked away from the charmed circle of Mr. Bush's friends by crossing the frontiers of Kuwait. Which left Syria as the prime beneficiary of the president's grace and the grace of his secretary of state, James Baker.

To be sure, Syria was a member of the anti-Iraq coalition in the Gulf war, although its military contribution and casualties were minimal. But the Syrian involvement did not come about because Damascus was affronted by Baghdad's aggression. It came about because the Iraqi Ba'ath and the Syrian Ba'ath had long been vying with each other to dominate the region: two neighboring dictatorships purporting to have one secular and socialist ideology, but steeped in ancient denominational hatreds. Saddam's miscalculation was Hafez al-Assad's opportunity to wound his longtime enemy, and he took it.

There was, of course, a price to be paid by the United States for Syria's cooperation. We had to become inured to the atrocities Assad has periodically inflicted on American citizens. The most recent and bloody such episode was the terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 in which 259 people died. The ongoing pain of the victims' families was not reflected on Mr. Baker's face during his famous, smiling photo op with Syria's leaders: as ever with Mr. Baker, bygones are forever bygones. About those Americans who cannot possibly be considered bygones, however—the American hostages held captive in Syria-controlled Lebanon—Mr. Baker has kept a tactful silence. Indeed, his unctuousness toward the Syrians has appar-

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ently had no effect in gaining the Americans' release. It does not take much perspicacity to see the reason for this. An imprisoned American has real value to the Syrians as a lever on U.S. policy. A freed American has none.

The administration has now made itself complicit in Syria's regional ambitions by acquiescing to Syria's virtual annexation of Lebanon. Hafez al-Assad is a patient man, and after fifteen years he has accomplished in Lebanon precisely what we acted so decisively to frustrate in Kuwait. Although it has a president ostensibly of its own, Lebanon is now Syrian property. The treaty of friendship between Syria and Lebanon signed on May 22, delicately called the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination, merely puts the seal on the effective occupation of the latter by the former. One of the clauses in the treaty allows Syrian troops to be stationed anywhere in Lebanon. Mr. Assad greeted the pact with the remark that Lebanon and Syria were henceforth one people in two states.

Some thirty deputies have now been, with Syria's advice and consent, appointed to the parliament in Beirut to replace those who have gone or were delivered to their eternal rewards since the last election in 1972. The American ambassador, Mr. Ryan Crocker, who had been prodding recalcitrant Lebanese—the majority of the population—to bend to the Syrian inevitability, gave the agreement Washington's explicit blessing, saying that it would guarantee Lebanese independence. (Of course, it guarantees precisely the opposite.) But the Beirut government itself, composed of certified nobodies, won't in any case test the proposition. Thus the cruel dominion of determined Alawites who run Syria has now been extended from the ethnic groups and sects within that country to the Christians, the Druze, the Shiites, and the Sunnis in Lebanon. Since Assad is both well-armed and qualmless, he may be able to rule over them as the central authorities of autonomous Lebanon never could, as the current truce between the various militias now testifies. But if dissent or division breaks out once more, it will not be a pretty picture, even by the very unpretty standards of that ravaged country.

Only someone as obdurate as Secretary Baker—and as oblivious as President Bush—would embark on trying to convince Israel to give up the Golan Heights, which commands the entire Galilee region, at the very moment Syria has virtually snuffed out, with American permission, the political autonomy of the neighboring state of Lebanon. But that is now the ambition of the State Department. It falls in line with the conventional Arabist wisdom that Assad is somehow to be trusted, but that Israel isn't. President Carter was particularly fond of this delusion. It also besmirched the Reagan administration, encouraging it to enforce a ceasefire in the 1982 Lebanese war that prevented Israel, a matter of days from its goal, from forcing Syrian troops back behind their borders and out of the country. From such acts of misguided even-handedness does human misery emerge.

The decision by Washington to insist on a UN presence at Arab-Israeli peace talks is another direct attempt to appease Syrian concerns. The UN role is essential if the Arab states are to avoid the difficult—but essential—act of negotiating face to face with the Israelis. More important, the UN is a trusty ally for Syrian concerns. Two permanent members of its Security Council—China and the Soviet Union—do not even officially recognize the Jewish state. Given the UN's record in the Middle East, it is inconceivable that in any close decision between Syrian and Israeli interests it would decide in favor of the Israelis. That may, of course, be exactly what Messrs. Bush and Baker find so appealing about it.

Indeed, the State Department is so sensitive to Syrian sensibilities that it hasn't even tried to curtail the sales by Communist countries to Damascus of advanced aircraft (MIG-29s), tanks (T-72s), and missile technology, including improved Scuds. If our policy of constructive engagement with the present regimes in Moscow and Beijing has any merit at all, it could be measured by whether they are still stirring up conflicts in the Third World. In the Middle East they certainly are.

The final irony, of course, is that the administration's appeasement of Syria will probably fail on its own terms. By strengthening Syrian power over the hapless populace of Lebanon, the strategy only renders concessions from the Israelis less likely. Indeed, the prospect of Greater Syria on Israel's borders actually strengthens the hands of those in Israel who disavow any negotiations whatsoever—and those who think the logical response is the permanence of Greater Israel. If this is what Mr. Baker wants, he's going about it exactly the right way.

NOTEBOOK

900 FAN ALERT: Enthusiasts of our 900 number—and we know you're out there—will be pleased to learn that the longish introductory material that greeted callers before has been drastically shortened. No more "options" and "menus" and similar technobabble—just a chance to say what's on your mind. And callers who worry that nobody listens should quit worrying. We do listen. In fact, some of us take the tapes with us and play them in our cars. (We think of it as a portable call-in radio show, and it works in tunnels.) We welcome complaints and comments (1-900-726-6671). By the way, our penultimate poll question found 79 percent of callers agreed with us that Israeli settlements on the West Bank were not the primary obstacle to peace in the Middle East.

OH SAY, CAN YOU SEE? On Sunday, June 10, *The New York Times* ran a story on page one under the headline, "A Hoosier Hurrah on Cole Porter Centennial." The opening paragraph read as follows:

> PERU, Ind., June 8—Unbowed by 35 years of carrying the mail, Al Dunn stood up and sang the national anthem this

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morning. Except for "America the Beautiful" and "Happy Birthday," which everybody sang, all the other music here at Peru High School auditorium was by Cole Porter.

Disturbing questions arise: 1) Does *The New York Times* think "America the Beautiful" is the national anthem, or does it think that the national anthem was written by Cole Porter? 2) Why should thirty-five years of carrying the mail prevent someone from singing the national anthem? 3) If the story is about people singing Cole Porter, why does it begin with Mr. Dunn, who is nowhere else referred to and apparently did not sing a word of Cole Porter? Perhaps it has become *Times* policy to begin every story with the singing of the national anthem, or at least every story reporting on an occasion where the national anthem was sung. We hate to sound unpatriotic, but this will not enhance the paper's baseball coverage.

MISTAKES WERE MADE: Mark Hatfield has a funny way of admitting he did wrong. "I suppose I felt my votes on these issues would carry me on the integrity image on all these other things I got careless on," the senator confessed to the Portland *Oregonian* last month. He was referring to the gifts and free tuition for his son that were given to him by indicted University of South Carolina president James Holderman. "I have come to the conclusion I have let my integrity become restricted to the issues too much, and not enough, perhaps, to every act and procedure of my office." Mistakes, no doubt, were made. We've heard of handlers, aides, consultants, minders—but "integrity restricters"? Has Hatfield revealed a new profession? The possibilities for Washingtonians are virtually endless.

PORN FRITTERS: Last week the New York State legislature debated a proposal to auction assault weapons to cover the state's $8.5 billion deficit. This week New York entered the pornography business. The state tax department auctioned off more than 1,400 porn videos (all to one buyer) confiscated from a tax-evading videomonger. Among those sold: *Tortured Woman* and *Bound for Bondage*. "We didn't particularly like selling this stuff," explained spokesman Karl Felsen. One critic, J. Alan Davitt, executive director of the New York State Catholic Conference, responded, "This is like confiscating dope and then selling it to raise money." Well, not quite. But we wish the buyer the best from his couple of thousand hours of viewing pleasure.

PASSAGE TO KUWAIT: Our Kuwaiti allies, allegedly made wiser by their ordeal, have yet to change their ways. Visas granted visitors to Kuwait still read as follows: "This permit is considered invalid if bearer obtained an Israeli visa." Hill and Knowlton, the public relations company that advises the emir on how to improve his image in the United States, apparently overlooked this one. So did our State Department, which promised a new dawn in Arab-Israeli matters in the aftermath of Desert Storm. We don't know how many hundreds of Western journalists had this ugly little caveat printed on their travel documents. We do know, however, that not a single one of them—so concerned about getting the facts out—saw fit to tell his or her readers (or viewers) about it.

GOODFELLOWS: The judges of the Marie Syrkin Fellowship in Letters in Jerusalem—Irving Howe, Cynthia Ozick, and Leon Wieseltier—are pleased to announce, after a rich and rigorous competition, the first winners of the prize. They are Michael Scammell, to further his research for a biography of Arthur Koestler, and Kathryn Hellerstein, to assist her work on the translation and criticism of the Yiddish poet Kadya Molodowsky. The deadline for next year's applications will be January 15, 1993. Inquiries may be sent to the Marie Syrkin Fellowship, 1220 19th Street NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20036.

A truce in the p.c. wars.

TOLERANCE 101

By Arthur M. Melzer

The great war that now rages on the American campus pits the defenders of Western Civilization against its attackers, or, if you prefer, "racists, sexists, and homophobes" against "neo-McCarthyites." But the strangest thing about this war is that, rhetoric aside, the goals of the two sides appear to be pretty similar. Those who attack "Western Civilization" do so only, they claim, to promote greater tolerance. In their very language, they purport to serve—or at most radicalize—the central principle of modern Western Civilization (although the more extreme attackers would like to believe that no one before them was ever sincere). The opponents of "political correctness" also operate from a desire to rid the university of intolerant dogma. What's needed is a way of calling the bluff of each side: a course on tolerance that both sides might find difficult to disavow.

How is tolerance to be taught? This central question cannot be answered without an adequate understanding of the causes of intolerance. Ignorance of diversity, according to the most prevalent view, is the primary cause of prejudice; and thus "multiculturalism" is the cure, which will open up the naive, ethnocentric, white, Western, patriarchal consciousness to the liberating "otherness" of diverse civilizations (suitably purged, of

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course, of castes, cannibals, and clitoridectomies).

But this paradigm, which may have been adequate for an earlier time, seems suddenly outdated in view of a striking but undeniable fact. On the one hand, the present generation of students, more than any other in history, has been exposed—since Sesame Street—to the depiction and celebration of diversity. On the other hand, its commitment to toleration has clearly weakened, while unexpected new strains of prejudice have sprouted. Clearly we need to think again about the sources of prejudice as well as about the varied effects on the human mind of a prolonged exposure to diversity. I would argue in particular that two new mutant strains of intolerance have evolved today that are resistant to "multiculturalism" precisely because they grow not from ignorance of diversity, but somehow from diversity itself.

First, people who grow up in a world of great skepticism and diversity, instead of learning to question and think for themselves, often learn not to think at all. For what is the point of seriously doubting the beliefs you already feel comfortable with—an arduous and painful process—when you are constantly taught that there are many such beliefs, all equally good, and all "just a matter of opinion" anyway? In such a world, the whole phenomenon of conscientious self-scrutiny and principled openness tends to lose its raison d'etre. The danger that people will arrogantly impose their beliefs on others is happily diminished, but so too is the vital pressure to use others' beliefs to criticize and enlarge one's own. Self-criticism turns to self-satisfaction. And that is how diversity has itself become a force for complacency and prejudice.

The result is people of conventional and unexamined opinions who do not believe in anything strongly enough to engage in systematic persecution, but who also lack the strength of principle that would lead them to stand up to the intolerance of others, and the intolerance within themselves. Students today believe as a matter of course that "everyone is different," but precisely for this reason they are too morally mellowed out to object to racist jokes on the university radio, mock slave auctions at a fraternity party, or the abusive lyrics of 2 Live Crew and Andrew Dice Clay. Can't a guy have fun anymore? They have less of the crusading, idealistic, dogmatic type of intolerance, but more of the visceral, nihilistic, self-indulgent kind. One can try to preach to them the importance of greater "sensitivity," but they are weary of this old sermon, which often only succeeds in convincing them that they are the ones being persecuted. In short, this new breed of intolerance—a lazy, easygoing loutishness—thrives on "diversity" and will not be dispelled by more of it.

There is also a second new strain of intolerance that tends to arise precisely in a multicultural society. When people experience the debilitating effects of diversity just described—the loss of certainty, strong belief, and universal principles—they often counteract them by actively closing their minds. This is true of the cults of the left as much as of the right. Moral and religious doctrines, under the pressure of an environment of heightened skepticism and diversity, tend to mutate into dogmatisms, hardened against outside influence. They indulge their own subjectivism, diabolicize nonbelievers, cultivate a certain contempt for reason. This reaction against diversity is the true source of the cults, New Wave superstitions, and narrower forms of religiosity—the Moonies and channelers, the radical feminists and flaky fundamentalists—that have been proliferating in recent years. How, then, can more diversity as such be the cure for this strain of intolerance, any more than for the first?

If this alternative "sociology of intolerance" is correct, then what a liberal and liberating education needs at its core is not still another ineffectual display of diversity, but a direct, rational defense of the ideal of tolerance—a defense that explains to the first group why this particular ideal is not "just a matter of opinion" (and not the boring, stale platitude they find it to be), and that explains to the second group why tolerance ought not to undermine their beliefs but rather to become one of them. What follows is a brief "course outline" for such a defense—an interdisciplinary "reasoned history" of the ideal of tolerance, with emphasis on its emergence in the Enlightenment and its embodiment in the American founding. This more or less traditional approach (which, in the post-modernist university, is also the most radical) should give proponents of "Western Civ" what they want while promoting, in a more solid and effectual way, a genuine respect for diversity.

Let us start by recognizing that human beings do not want to be tolerant. What comes naturally is naive provincialism, prejudice, and ethnocentrism. Material drawn from psychology, sociology, and anthropology might be used to illustrate this tendency, but intolerance must not be patronized as merely a primitive and irrational impulse. There are, after all, good reasons to live in a community of shared religious and moral beliefs. Indeed, for these very reasons all traditional societies and all pre-modern philosophers of society have been hostile to the mixing of religions, mores, and cultures in one society. The first part of the course should explore the real attractions of the closed, homogeneous society, through a coordinated study of philosophical texts and historical examples: the first book of Aristotle's *Politics* and Plutarch's "Life of Lycurgus," the founder of Sparta, would be places to start. Then there's also eighteenth-century Geneva and Rousseau's *Letter to M. d'Alembert.*

It then becomes possible to see our familiar ideal of tolerance for what it is: a radically new idea, a veritable revolution in the way of conceiving organized society. This revolution, which began with the Enlightenment, may essentially be equated with the emergence of the modern liberal state, which, by tying people together through an alliance of enlightened self-interest rather than through shared moral and religious beliefs, made

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possible for the first time an intentionally "open society"—a tolerant, heterogeneous, pluralistic, secularized, morally neutral, modern state. In such a society the flourishing of diversity and pluralism, which in the past had existed only as a by-product and symptom of political decline, could be embraced for the first time as a form of social health.

Once the open society was seen to be possible in principle, the arguments favoring it came flooding in: historical arguments about the dangers of persecution, fanaticism, and sectarian strife; epistemological arguments about the uncertainty of our moral and religious knowledge; aesthetic arguments regarding the superior beauty of diversity to uniformity; moral arguments about the strength of character that derive from individuality and self-reliance; religious arguments concerning the necessarily private character of authentic choice and belief; and political arguments about the stability arising from a great diversity of competing interest groups, about the necessary connection between diversity and all forms of social and intellectual progress, and about the need for diversity to counteract the insidious danger of the "tyranny of the majority" endemic to democratic societies. Part two of the course will examine these arguments, especially as they were made during the Enlightenment, when the modern ideal of liberal tolerance was not yet buried in apathy but was struggling to be born. The texts could include, among others, Montaigne's *Essays*, Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, Locke's *Letter on Toleration*, and Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

The third part of the course should focus more concretely on the study of the first country to be founded self-consciously upon these new liberal principles. That country is, of course, our own. Even today the United States remains the nation most unambiguously dedicated to these principles. Americans are Americans regardless of race, creed, or national origin, whereas the English, for example, or the Swedes, are a nation as well as a political association. Thus, we should study the assertion and defense of these principles in the great founding documents of our revolutionary period in order to deepen our understanding of them and to demonstrate that tolerance is not only a good idea but also particularly our own idea, our heritage as Americans.

To say that America is, in principle, dedicated to the liberal ideals of toleration and openness is not to say that it has sufficiently lived up to those ideals (just as our failure fully to live up to them does not mean that they are not truly our ideals). To illustrate these points we should begin with the central paradox and tragedy of American history, the institution of slavery, and trace the struggle for civil rights to the present day. Particular use should be made of African American writings, both earlier—Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois (*The Souls of Black Folk*)—and contemporary (the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*) in order to acquaint students with a real tradition, as well as to give them a chance to immerse themselves in what may be an alien perspective and world. The changing role of women in American society should be studied in this context as well. See the writings of early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as well as more recent works, such as Juliet Mitchell's *Woman's Estate*.

Finally, we must pose the difficult question of whether there are limits to the openness and diversity possible in a society. Here, returning in some measure to where we began, we address the endemic problems and insecurities of an atomized, liberal society, examine the corrosive historical forces that it sets in motion, debate the question of censorship, and discuss the role played by such phenomena as religious associations, ethnic roots, and so forth, in creating islands of homogeneity and shared beliefs within the larger pluralistic society.

The idea is to give students an intellectually serious account of tolerance by inducing them to reenact, as it were, the history of their culture. The hope is to produce, or at least to begin the process of producing, a liberally educated human being, who has a rational, enduring commitment to the ideal of liberal tolerance based on an understanding of abstract, philosophical arguments, an appreciation of history, a sense of heritage, an awareness of what remains to be done, and a knowledge of limits.

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THE PRESS

HOT AIR RISING

By J. Michael Luhan

DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Seeing the misery visited upon Bangladesh by the largest cyclone in its history, reporters, perhaps understandably, didn't quibble with official claims about the exact scale of the carnage. Certainly it was appalling: entire villages smeared into empty mudflats; shorelines littered with bloated corpses and livestock carcasses; dazed survivors fighting hunger, exposure, and disease. But Bangladeshi government and relief officials deliberately misrepresented and embellished the known loss of life, and the international press went along with the ruse even after it was brought to light.

The focus of disaster news tends to be on the dead as opposed to the living. "Death tolls" fit neatly into headlines, are unambiguous, and pack more emotional wallop than the "homeless," "threatened," or otherwise afflicted. When it comes to news, the general rule

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is the worse the better. Bad news sells, and reporters can expect little enthusiasm from editors for information that makes the story less dramatic. (An old Fleet Street joke has it that the worst headline ever written was, "Earthquake In Peru, Not Many Killed.") In the case of Bangladesh, all of these factors served to exaggerate known losses in human life and to the physical infrastructure.

Because death tolls are the prime mode for rating disasters and debating the response to them, big numbers have obvious benefits for impoverished governments like Bangladesh's in approaching foreign donors for aid. Modesty brings no reward; the bigger the disaster appears, the bigger will be the response. For private relief agencies—which, like army generals, never have enough manpower and materials to do their jobs properly—prudence and politics likewise favor worst-case scenarios. In assessing the cyclone's damage the agencies were like the proverbial blind men trying to describe an elephant, each with a limited grasp of the whole picture, so they deferred to the government's body count—and assigned staff members to double as press officers and guide journalists to the hardest-hit areas.

This problem is particularly relevant now because of the world's growing "donor fatigue" from absorbing so many catastrophes simultaneously. Relief is a finite commodity these days: too much for one place means too little for another, and people will die unnecessarily. Like battlefield casualties, Ethiopians, Somalians, Sudanese, Iraqi Shiites and Kurds, and now Bangladeshis, must be lined up and tagged for treatment according to the severity of their wounds. Because the media heavily influence this grim process, it cannot blithely pass along inflated tolls on the assumption that no harm is done.

The precise number of deaths from the April 30 cyclone that struck Bangladesh will probably never be known. Census figures are notoriously inaccurate, and many of the victims were swept out to sea by the tide. Twenty-one years after the country's last major cyclone in 1970, estimates of the death toll still range anywhere from 300,000 to 1 million. In 1988 relief officials warned that heavy flooding would cause tens of thousands of deaths; the final toll was less than 1,700, largely due to efficient emergency work by the military.

Early reports about deaths in this year's tempest varied wildly. On May 1 the Associated Press, citing government sources, reported that 1,000 people had perished. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia made no comment after a helicopter tour of the coastal region just hours after the cyclone abated, but Sheikh Hasina Wazed, the fiesty opposition leader, played down the destruction. "It is not as fierce as we anticipated it would be," she told accompanying reporters. Within forty-eight hours Relief Minister Lutfar Rahman Khan had estimated the possible death toll to be 100,000. Finance Minister Saifur Rahman, speaking in Washington, said that "past experiences" suggested it would reach twice that amount, and 200,000 soon became the government's official projection.

It met with little skepticism from reporters for *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, and other foreign news organizations, who toured the afflicted areas and saw devastation of villages that approached 100 percent. "From the air I could see that no structure was intact," reported *Newsweek*'s Ron Moreau after flying over the island of Kutubdia. "All that's left of most farms is a grove of leafless, bent trees that once surrounded a thatched house of which there is no longer any trace."

Divergent assessments are common in the chaotic aftermath of large-scale disasters. But in Bangladesh, literally overnight, relief officials began offering damage reports of exacting precision. On May 3 the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society put the "known" death toll at 92,256, a figure that government ministry officials quickly adopted. On May 5 Red Crescent's secretary-general, Ali Qureshi, announced it had climbed to 125,651 "as of 6 p.m.," conjuring visions of information banks churning away in the back room.

Two days later the Finance Ministry presented a public request to donors for $1.4 billion in aid to cope with the crisis, half for emergency relief and half for long-term rehabilitation. The coordinator of the UN Disaster Relief Organization, Mohammed Essafi, likewise called for "massive external assistance," including 800,000 tons of food to replenish government stores. Meanwhile, the death toll continued marching steadily toward the government's official projection. On May 12 the Relief Ministry put the "known deaths" at 138,868 and still counting. But counting what, exactly? Bodies? Burials? Door-to-door village surveys? This was never clarified. The government claimed only that its figures were based on reports being collected and relayed by field-based officials in twenty-four affected *upazilas*, or administrative subdistricts.

Yet on May 12 the chairmen of three of the largest and worst-hit *upazilas*—Kutubdia, Maheshkhali, and Cox's Bazaar—all told me their body counts were in fact declining, as villagers thought to have perished steadily trickled back to their villages. On Kutubdia, where the federal government said 20,000 were dead and 10,000 missing, local officials had accounted for all but about 16,000. Furthermore, Mohammed Siddiquer Rahman, a cabinet secretary appointed by the prime minister to oversee the relief effort, personally collected this information in my presence during a helicopter tour of the region. The official toll remained unchanged.

On May 14 *The Washington Post* reported that Bangladesh might be deliberately hiking the death toll to fatten its emergency aid requests. "The Bangladeshis are past masters of the aid business," the *Post* quoted an unidentified international official as saying. "It's just nonsense the way these numbers were built up. Nobody even knows what the population of Bangladesh is." The article said that "a senior Bangladeshi relief official" had privately estimated the ac-

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tual toll at closer to 60,000 or 70,000.

The *Post* report drew heated denials from the Bangladesh government and indignant rebukes from local papers. Western journalists took note, but generally shrugged; no one knew how many had died, and the government's figure seemed a reasonable estimate. Private relief officials maintained a studied neutrality. "We are not in a position to assess those figures," said CARE spokesman Robin Needham. "We try to soberly reflect what usually responsible local government officials are predicting." The government holds to 139,000 dead, and international wire services continue using it without qualification.

The chain of events illustrated a cardinal rule in managing disaster news. Press coverage is like a tidal wave, intense but short-lived, and you've got to catch the wave before it passes. If real information is scarce, put up some big numbers and let them ride. Chances are they'll go a long way. Fair enough; emergencies can rarely wait for statisticians. But in this case the government went one step further, peddling guesses as certainties. In the *Post* article, officials acknowledged that their figures were actually "an estimate and subject to change" but defended them as conservative compared with others floating around. When the numbers of confirmed deaths began to fall, the government refused to acknowledge the fact.

As for the homeless, threatened, and otherwise afflicted (anywhere from 2 million to 10 million, take your pick), they too fared considerably better than most predictions. Although some villages like Anowara and Bashkhali remained hellholes of neglect and desperation into late May, most affected areas had stabilized and feared epidemics had been averted. On the islands of Sandwip, Maheshkhali, and Kutubdia (all of which suffered near-total destruction according to early reports), and all along the hard-hit channel, thousands of newly thatched houses had already been thrown back together within two weeks after the cyclone, most with no aid at all. The explanation was quite simple: thatching grows free on trees, and about the only cash expense is nails.

According to UNICEF, the vast majority of the 100,000 tube wells that provided fresh water in the cyclone-affected areas should be easily salvageable by simply flushing out contaminated water for thirty minutes. And Mohammed Omar Farooq, the federal government's top relief official for the southern district known as Cox's Bazaar (population 1.4 million), said that if 200 water pumps were made available—at a few hundred dollars apiece—every contaminated community water pond in the district could be cleaned out within two weeks and quickly refilled by the monsoons.

As for the food situation, the World Food Program calculates that 45,000 tons of rice are required to support 10 million Bangladeshis for a three-month period. Before the cyclone, the government already had 800,000 tons in reserve stocks and a standing commitment from WFP to provide 400,000 more by June. And 1991 is expected to produce the country's biggest rice harvest in history, another 700,000 tons. "Bangladesh has and will have enough food to meet the problems of emergency relief with existing stocks," said Charles Larsimont, resident representative of the UN Development Program in Dhaka. Ethiopians should have it so good.

J. MICHAEL LUHAN is a freelance correspondent in South Asia whose reporting on the Bangladesh cyclone appeared in *The New York Times.*

SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

VACCINATION MARKET

By Robert Bazell

AIDS already has challenged the way the medical establishment thinks about the availability of experimental drugs for people who suffer from deadly diseases. Now it's beginning to shake traditional attitudes in an area that affects far more people, and that has potentially greater social and ethical implications: the availability of experimental vaccines for people who don't actually have a disease, but are at risk of contracting one.

In Thailand, the U.S. and Thai armies for years have been running a research facility known as AFRIMS, the Armed Forces Research Institute for Medical Science. Soon—perhaps within months—AFRIMS could be coordinating the first human tests of vaccines designed to prevent infection with the virus (HIV), which causes AIDS. It is not that any potential vaccine appears so promising that it demands immediate large-scale testing in humans. Rather, it's the sheer scope of the public health problem that is convincing scientists and politicians that tests of something should begin as quickly as possible. The World Health Organization recently doubled its estimate of the number of people in the world who will be infected with HIV by the end of the century to 40 million. Plenty of epidemiologists believe that even that estimate fails to approach the actual number who will suffer if no vaccine becomes available soon.

The increasing attention afforded vaccine research is also due partly to the stalemate in finding feasible treatments for those already infected with HIV. As thousands of scientists and health care providers gather at the Seventh International Conference on AIDS in Florence from June 16 through 21, research on vaccines, presented on the final day of the conference, will likely

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receive more attention than any other topic. About twenty-five companies, ranging from start-up genetic engineering firms to large pharmaceutical houses, are trying to develop AIDS vaccines. Most of the products consist of various parts of the AIDS virus attached through genetic engineering either to an inert protein or to a live, harmless virus such as *vaccinia*, which was used to immunize against smallpox.

There have been many false starts in AIDS research. Most recently, a paper in the June 13 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* indicated that one of these products, a vaccine made with the GP 160 outercoat protein of HIV, might be helpful in treating people who are already infected. Because it was in the *New England Journal* a week before the conference, the paper got a lot of attention. But many responsible scientists believe the publicity was unwarranted. The sample size was too small and the results too preliminary to have much meaning. It is possible that the vaccine could someday help HIV-positive people, but meanwhile the real action is still with potential vaccines to prevent infection among those people who are HIV-negative.

Already hundreds of HIV-negative volunteers in the United States and Europe have gotten these various potential vaccines in so-called Phase I trials to determine whether the preparations are safe. So far there have been few side effects, and some evidence indicates that the volunteers may have developed partial immunity to the AIDS virus. But no one can know whether any potential vaccine works until researchers carry out efficacy trials, giving it to large numbers of people at risk for infection.

This makes for an interesting—and ethically complex—precedent. The gold standard of trials for possible *treatments* has long been double-blinded and placebo-controlled. In the same way, the rule of vaccine trials has been never to attempt large-scale efficacy studies until animal tests show that a potential vaccine protects against infection in animals.

But the same arguments are now being deployed for vaccine-testing as AIDS activists made in breaking down the traditional methods of testing for treatments. More consideration is being given to trying out potentially risky vaccines with less animal evidence because the virus is spreading so rapidly and because good animal models may take many years to develop. Indeed, this time around it is the governments of many of the Third World countries at risk rather than American AIDS activists who are most vocal in urging that large vaccine trials begin as quickly as possible.

The most likely preparations to be used in the first large trials will be a "cocktail" of several genetically engineered products that presents the body with as many of the HIV proteins as possible without exposing anyone to the actual virus. The design of the experiment is simple in concept. Pick a group of people for whom studies have shown the infection is climbing rapidly, give half of them the prospective vaccine and half a placebo. Thailand is the leading contender because AIDS, which appeared there only a few years ago among prostitutes who service foreigners, is now spreading through large segments of the population. The long-standing U.S.-Thai army cooperation would form a foundation. Thai soldiers would be the ideal volunteers because it is easier to keep track of people in the military. Haiti is the second choice, but U.S. officials worry that another revolution could rob them of their results.

Dozens of complex ethical questions must be answered, however, before large-scale efficacy tests can begin. Tests in Third World populations will reveal whether a vaccine is effective far more quickly than tests in any group in the U.S. or Europe, where education campaigns have slowed down the rate at which people are becoming infected. The biggest risk is that, no matter how safe initial studies show a vaccine to be, there is always the small chance that when thousands get it, some people could become ill. Is it necessary (or even possible) that the research subjects receive the same informed consent and medical support that subjects in an American trial would get? For example, should research subjects get lectures on safe sex? Healthy gay men in the U.S. who volunteered for the early safety tests of possible vaccines got such advice. The information would be a normal part of good medical care, but it would make the test subjects less likely to get infected than other residents of the same country and thus slow down the trials.

Tougher questions will arise if vaccine trials are blessed with success: Who will get the vaccine? And who will pay for it? The logical answer about who would get it would be those most at risk, in other words, a billion or so people, mostly residents of extremely poor countries. But this has never been done before, says Dr. Jonathan Mann of Harvard, the former head of WHO's AIDS program. Medical treatments and vaccines, he says, "have been used according to the laws of the marketplace, rather than according to the laws of what will best bring an epidemic under control. Making the vaccine widely available would be based on the idea that a life in Zaire and a life in Brazil and a life in the United States and a life in France are of equal value. This is quite revolutionary."

Mann has a point about conventional public health practice. One of the most recent examples of the way vaccines are traditionally made available is the vaccine against hepatitis B, a disease rampant in much of the Third World. You can get the shots almost anywhere if you have about $500. The vaccine is distributed essentially according to the free market. Even here, however, some exceptions have begun to be made. Recently China decided it would simply ignore international patent agreements and manufacture its own version of the vaccine for its own people. But an AIDS vaccine will likely prove too expensive to be amenable to such solutions. Although no one can yet estimate the cost of an AIDS vaccine, it will almost certainly cost more than most countries can afford, even forgetting patents.

Some individuals and organizations already are

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searching for ideas about paying for AIDS vaccine distribution. Dr. Mann has suggested that governments grant companies that make an AIDS vaccine extensions of patent rights on other profitable drugs as compensation. Of course, that would take money from the drug houses that manufacture the generic substitutes when the patents normally expire, but at least it's a vaguely promising beginning. The California legislature has already passed a law guaranteeing the state will buy certain quantities of an AIDS vaccine if one becomes available. The Connecticut legislature is considering a bill that would indemnify drug companies from liabilities associated with the manufacture of AIDS vaccine. The twenty-five companies working on AIDS vaccine clearly believe there is a good chance that someone will find a way to pay for the products.

But if some way of immunizing the world against AIDS is conceived, what about polio and diphtheria vaccines, sanitary water and all the other health protections that the wealthy nations enjoy? Should AIDS be the exception of international cooperation for health, or, once again, could it be a beginning?

ROBERT BAZELL is the science correspondent for NBC News.

Quotas in the State Department.

GENDER NORMING

By James Workman

By now you probably never want to read the word quota again. You've heard of race norming, the Labor Department practice of adjusting minorities' test scores to enhance their chances of getting jobs over whites. But you may not have heard of the newest play on this debate: gender norming. Once again, it takes place under the very auspices of those who would claim to spurn it: in the Reagan and Bush administrations' State Department. Women are getting a significant advantage over men in the testing, hiring, and assignment of Foreign Service Officers.

For decades the State Department engaged in what would now be rightly considered outrageous and unconscionable discrimination against women. Until the mid-1970s female foreign service officers had to resign when they got married. Because the job was considered masculine, few women bothered to apply for it anyway: each year less than 7 percent of the successful applicants were women. Because of the marriage policy, among other reasons, many women dropped out during the course of their careers, which left only 4.7 percent women in the corps and less than 2 percent at the senior officer grades. According to former female FSOs, most of the women who were employed by the Foreign Service were secretaries or wives of male officers, and the few women FSOs who remained were treated like secretaries and assigned to administrative, clerical, desk, and support duties "appropriate to women's nurturing instincts," as one woman was told. In FSO parlance, males were more often rated higher and given "stretch" (above their grade level of experience) assignments while women were given "downstretch."

To counter both overt and subtle forms of discrimination, roughly two dozen FSO women banded together in 1970 to form the Women's Action Organization. WAO worked through departmental task forces and ad hoc committees to lobby for changes. By 1974 State had finally removed the ban on marriage and began to train more women for senior-level positions, to discourage women who were contemplating resignation, and to reinstate many who had been forced to resign because of marriage. This increased the number of women FSO generalists from 149 to 234. But WAO believed the pace of change was too slow to ever bring about its goal of 50 percent representation of women in the Foreign Service. So in 1976 nine members filed a sex discrimination suit that challenged virtually all of the hiring, assignment, evaluation, and promotion practices of the FSO.

The suit took nine years to come to trial. In the meantime the State Department, concerned with bad publicity and the chance that it would lose control of its hiring and personnel, launched a systematic drive to recruit women through women's colleges, independent women's groups like the League of Women Voters, and advertising in women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Woman's World*, and *Ms.* The female registration rate rose to 30 percent within three years of the lawsuit. But inevitably the pool of women applicants so recruited was dramatically different from the men and women who applied on their own. According to Educational Testing Service records, before the lawsuit most of the successful female applicants held graduate degrees in international studies, political science, philosophy, linguistics, or government. More of the women now applying have undergraduate degrees in fields like English, art history, and literature.

As a result, a lower percentage of female applicants were passing the grueling Foreign Service exam than before the recruiting effort began. The State Department also began exhibiting more concern about its minority applicants, who were passing at a rate of only 7 percent, as opposed to the non-minority pass rate of 15 percent. So State began to tinker with the exam itself. Since the 1940s there had been five parts to the application process: an English Expression test of reading comprehension, grammar, usage, and communication skills; a three-hour General Background test of broad knowledge of world history, geography, culture, politics, and physics; and a Functional Field test indi-

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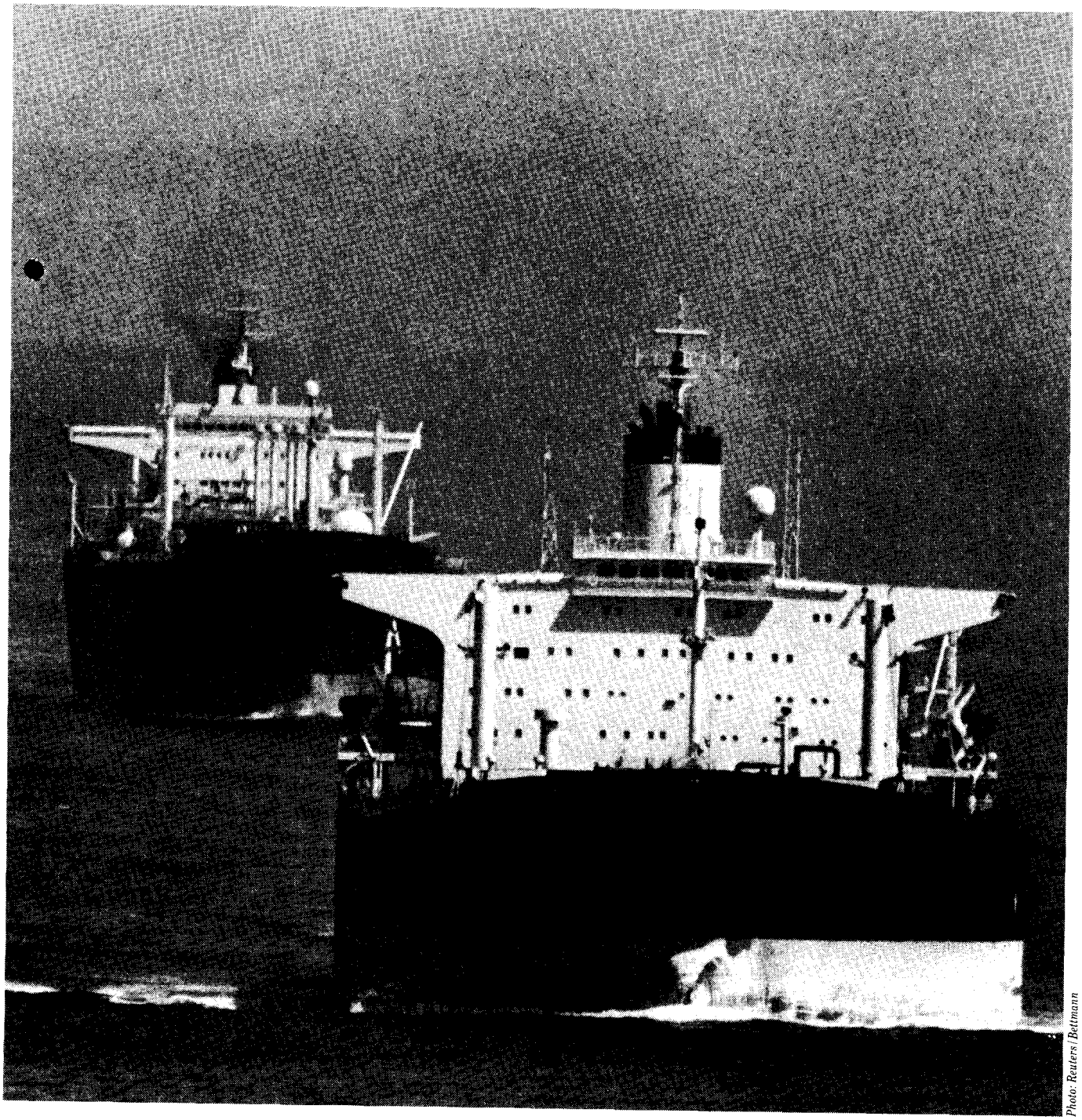

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With more than 100 operating nuclear plants in this country, nuclear electricity cuts U.S. oil imports by 740,000 barrels every day. That's more than the oil we imported from Iraq and Kuwait before hostilities broke out last August.

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cating which job track, or "cone," best suited the individual's strengths: administrative, consular, economic, or political. These were followed by a foreign language aptitude test. The cut-off score was 70. Applicants who passed went on to an oral assessment stage. The process winnowed more than 15,000 applicants to an elite group of 250 appointees.

Because exam records showed the foreign language test hurt the chances of minority applicants, by the late 1960s it was eliminated. But that change, in turn, hurt female applicants in general, who typically passed the foreign language test at a higher rate than men. To compensate, in 1977 the department began to weight the English test (in which women performed better than men) disproportionately over the Background, 60 percent to 40. But that subsequently hurt minority males, who were weaker than other populations in English skills. So in 1979 the department created a "near pass" category for minority applicants. This meant that the passing score of 70 no longer applied to minorities, who, according to testing personnel, have been passed with scores in the mid-50s.

The disproportionate weighting of the English test still wasn't passing the right number of women, so the department began to alter test questions. ETS began to recycle questions on which women did better than men, according to a 1981 progress report compiled by ETS and State. In a partial settlement with WAO in 1983, the pressure to gender norm came to a head. State agreed to implement the same "near pass" mechanism for selection of women as it had with minorities. Women who scored 1 to 4 points below the passing score were waved through to the next stage, thereby ensuring that equal proportions of male and female applicants would pass.

In 1985, meanwhile, the lawsuit finally came to trial. The plaintiffs initially argued that female FSOs were individually discriminated against. For example, one of the women who testified failed the written examination on eight occasions between 1962 and 1977. She eventually passed the written exam, only to fail the oral stages in 1978, 1980, and 1981. This could mean she was discriminated against, but it could also mean that though this woman was admirably determined, she was, like roughly 14,750 other applicants each year, just not as good as the top 250 who made the cut.

After months of trial hearings, District Court Judge John Lewis Smith II, on September 13, 1985, found no evidence of personal discrimination, and ruled for the State Department on every major count. The plaintiffs immediately appealed, brought the case before a U.S. Court of Appeals panel, and shifted their focus from individual discrimination to the correction of statistical imbalances. On March 24, 1987, Judge Patricia Wald, widely considered the federal court system's leading liberal, overturned Smith's ruling. Despite all the procedural efforts State had made over the last decade, Wald based her decision almost entirely on the final outcomes, finding that discrepancies still existed between the scores of men and women. Although State had passed 498 women who fell into the near-pass category after the 1985, 1986, and 1987 exams, women were still not scoring as high as men. This is not unusual in standardized testing: from LSATs to MCATs to college boards, women statistically score lower than men. Nevertheless, Wald ruled that the State Department had to come up with a process that would advance an equal proportion of women through each stage of the program, from the written exam up through assignments, performance evaluations, and, eventually, promotions.

The problem for the State Department and the lower court was how to do this without resorting to legally questionable quotas. In January 1989 a two-part solution was reached by Judge Aubrey Robinson, who ordered that for the 1985-87 exams, the Department must disregard the General Background and Functional Field sections and pass applicants only according to English Expression scores.

In addition, the scoring on future exams would be dramatically adjusted. Whereas in the past the department administratively decided that women with raw exam scores a few points lower than men would be passed through to the next stage, now the department has simply substituted percentile scores—separately computed for men and women—for raw scores. In the words of the document explaining this (which had to be obtained from an unofficial source after the court and both parties to the lawsuit balked at providing it), the State Department decided to "devise scoring procedures which will ensure no disparate impact on women *before* the initial scoring of the examination." (Emphasis mine.) The department does this by

> creating separate rank order lists based on raw examination scores for men and women. An equal percentage of males and females would be identified from each rank order list as test passers. Candidates who have thus passed the written examination will receive a percentile score derived from their position on their own rank order list. This will mean that the highest scoring man and the highest scoring woman will each receive the same percentile score, as will any pair of men and women who hold the same relative position on their own rank order list.

The numbers have been made equal, in other words, but what they measure has not. This is classic "norming," and the difference between it and a simple quota is a question for semanticists or theologians, not ordinary mortals.

Nobody knows what effect, if any, all this will have on the quality of the Foreign Service. But the new dispensation means that nowadays a person (male or female) can be appointed to the most prestigious international branch of the U.S. government career service regardless of his or her ability to answer written questions about foreign policy, as long as he or she knows where to place a semicolon. Old prejudices and injustices have indeed been overcome, but women FSOs may now have to face a new prejudice, an assumption that they are less qualified than their male colleagues. ●

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Liberals and forgotten constitutions.

ALTERED STATES

By Jeff Rosen

Pro-choice forces are sounding grim these days. Justice David H. Souter's swing vote to uphold a regulation that bars federally financed family planning clinics from mentioning abortion could mean that *Roe* v. *Wade* will be overturned even sooner than expected. But whatever the fate of *Roe*, liberals are coming to recognize the futility of relying on the Supreme Court—especially in its increasingly conservative incarnation—to uphold abortion rights, or any rights that depend on a claimed right to privacy in the Constitution. Some pro-choice activists are already starting to redirect their energies to state legislatures. But there's a much more effective way to ensure that abortion rights and other individual rights are protected: bypassing the legislators and asking the people to ratify amendments to their state constitutions.

There are at least three reasons why state constitutions protect abortion rights more securely than state laws. First, because state constitutional amendments are ratified by the people, they tend to reflect the will of the voters much more accurately than their elected representatives ever can—and a majority of voters support some version of the pro-choice position. As the recent abortion debate shows, legislators can be easily swayed by powerful pro-life groups, even when their constituents are predominantly pro-choice. (After the Idaho legislature passed a stringent anti-abortion law in March 1990, for example, the governor vetoed it, and in the next election a majority of the candidates identified with the pro-life movement lost.) Second, state constitutional amendments tend to last a lot longer than the average statute or politician's position on abortion: once pro-choice amendments are ratified, anti-abortion minorities will have a hard time knocking them out. Finally, by proposing constitutional amendments, the pro-choice movement can move from the defensive to the offensive: Americans are more likely to mobilize in favor of pro-choice amendments than against laws that discourage abortion.

In addition to ratifying new state constitutional amendments (which takes only a majority of voters in every state but Delaware), liberals can continue to rely on existing ones to protect individual rights. During the 1970s and early '80s, eleven states ratified explicit right-to-privacy amendments, and twelve ratified ERAs. Since states can interpret their constitutions to provide more (but not less) protection than the U.S. Constitution provides, courts in these states have been protecting abortion rights, gay rights, and the rights of free expression more securely than the Warren or Burger Courts dared.

Unlike *Roe* v. *Wade*, most of these decisions can't be attacked as judicial activism. There's a big difference between "discovering" a right to privacy in the U.S. Constitution that isn't explicitly there, as the Warren Court did, and pointing to a right to privacy in the Florida constitution that *is* explicitly there and applying it to strike down a parental consent bill, as the Florida Supreme Court did in 1989. Since many of the state privacy amendments were passed with the intention of codifying the Warren Court's decision that some rights to sexual privacy are fundamental, extending them to abortion seems to be consistent with the "original understanding" of the amendments' ratifiers.

New privacy amendments can also be proposed, as they were in Massachusetts and Connecticut last year. But to eliminate confusion about what the voters intended, why not draft more specifically worded amendments in the first place? An amendment can clearly say: "The right to choose abortion is fundamental and may not be restricted by government before the third trimester."

Either way, of course, state constitutions will never guarantee the uniform protection for abortion that *Roe* once did. Although the threat of draconian restrictions in most states has been exaggerated, it's clear that once *Roe* falls, the country will have a patchwork of laws restricting abortion. Encouraged by recent Supreme Court decisions, a few states are already devising creative ways to discourage abortion: the North Dakota and Mississippi legislatures, for example, recently passed laws requiring doctors to show pictures of fetuses to prospective mothers. And despite the problem of unrepresentative legislators, it's a fantasy to expect the people of North Dakota or Mississippi to pass amendments tomorrow protecting abortion on demand. But there's still a chance that women in some states where most people oppose abortion rights could secure those rights from state constitutions rather than from state legislatures: the South Carolina, Alabama, and Louisiana constitutions, for example, are among the eleven that already guarantee a right to privacy.

Gay rights forces also have been relying on state constitutions, ever since the Supreme Court in *Bowers* v. *Hardwick* called the claim that homosexuals have a federal right to privacy "at best, facetious." The right of gay men to have sex might well be protected by the eleven state privacy amendments, in light of their framers' concern with sexual privacy. The twelve state equal rights amendments might also be helpful, if restrictions on homosexual but not heterosexual sodomy are seen as a form of discrimination on the basis of gender. In any case, most state constitutions, like the U.S. Constitution, guarantee everyone equal protection of the laws, which casts serious doubt on the seven state laws that prohibit sodomy only by homosexuals.

There will always be cases, of course, in which judges

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fall back on the Warren Court trick of inventing or inferring constitutional rights, and that's why amendments that explicitly protect rights are always a more secure route. Michigan and Texas recently struck down anti-sodomy statutes under their state constitutions, basing their decisions on the right to privacy. Unfortunately, the right to privacy is not mentioned in either constitution. Essentially, both courts "discovered" a right to privacy in their due process clauses (No person shall be deprived of liberty "without due process of law"). In states without privacy amendments, a more plausible state protection for homosexuals is the equal protection clause, which a Kentucky court recently invoked to strike down an anti-sodomy law.

The recent constitutional dramas surrounding pot in Alaska and "victims' rights" in California and Arizona show that judges who stray too far from the people's understanding of their state constitutions are likely to get chucked out of office or overruled by voters. Soon after the citizens of Alaska adopted a privacy amendment in 1972, the Alaska Supreme Court decided that the amendment protected the people's right to smoke pot at home. Although a literal interpretation of the amendment might indeed protect discreet pot smokers (inconsistently, the Alaska court refused to protect private crack use), citizens who voted for the amendment immediately cried foul. They hadn't intended to decriminalize pot, many said. And last December a majority of voters passed a legislative initiative making possession a criminal offense once more. As for victims' rights, at the end of 1990 angry California and Arizona voters adopted constitutional amendments forbidding liberal judges from construing their constitutions to provide broader rights for criminal defendants than the federal Constitution provides.

Right to privacy and equal rights amendments are the most obvious and frequently invoked provisions, but a close look at state constitutions reveals lots of buried treasures: the Michigan constitution requires the legislature to provide "care, treatment, education or rehabilitation" of the handicapped, and the Louisiana, Illinois, and Florida constitutions prohibit discrimination on the basis of physical condition. Louisiana also prohibits age discrimination, which the Supreme Court has said the U.S. Constitution doesn't. The Montana constitution protects the "inalienable right to a clean and healthful environment." The California constitution says that reporters can refuse to disclose sources without being held in contempt. Thirty-five state charters recognize an affirmative right to free speech, rather than simply restraining governmental action, as the First Amendment does. Even gun control forces may find some ammunition in state constitutions. Thirty-six states (from Maine to Washington) have gun clauses, and many of them explicitly limit the right to bear arms in a way that the Second Amendment doesn't.

"We always shudder to think that we have to put our fundamental rights up to a vote," Evan Wolfson of the Lambda Legal Defense Fund told me. It's time to stop shuddering. During the Bork hearings, 73 percent of Americans said they believe in a constitutional right to privacy. Why not challenge them to prove it by ratifying privacy amendments to their state constitutions? Better yet, why don't they say exactly what they mean by passing abortion amendments, gay rights amendments, and amendments that protect other individual rights? Liberals will never know which rights really are fundamental until they trust the people enough to ask.

JEFF ROSEN is a former TNR reporter-researcher.

Can the EMU fly?

FUNNY MONEY

By Niall Ferguson

Europe with a single currency sounds dandy. No more vacation hours spent paying unpredictable commission charges in bureaucratic European banks, no more coming home with pockets full of Monopoly-money notes. What could be simpler and saner than a single currency, legal tender from London to Lisbon?

They're working on it. Since December 1989 an intergovernmental commission has been laboring over the details of what Eurocrats call Stage 2 of Economic and Monetary Union, or EMU. This could mean the creation of a Central European Bank as early as 1994, with a single currency by the end of the decade. Polls show that 64 percent of EC citizens accept the idea. In May even the once reluctant British appeared to bow to the inevitable, dropping their alternative scheme for a parallel (rather than single) European currency. But despite the consensus there remain, as the British chancellor recently put it, "a million questions." Or, to be exact, two: Will it work? And is it really necessary? Economics and history suggest the answer to both is no.

The dream of a single bill of exchange across Europe goes back some way. There were moves toward harmonizing the main European currencies soon after the Bretton Woods exchange rate system broke down in 1971, with the creation of a voluntary agreement to keep currencies in line with each other—the so-called snake. In 1978 France and Germany went one step further: they set up (in classic Eurospeak) a system of "fixed but flexible exchange rates," otherwise known as the European Monetary System.

The current system, which developed out of the EMS, is best explained by an image. Picture seven climbers,

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AIDS & THE HEALTH CARE CATASTROPHE

Your health is fine. But your zip code is grounds to deny you coverage.

People with chronic ailments and those perceived by health insurers to be at heightened risk for AIDS already know how it feels to be abused by the health insurance industry.

Workers are being denied health coverage just because of where they live. Contracted benefits are delayed or not paid. Excluding people with cancer or heart disease, or people who have tested positive for HIV, discourages the kind of treatment that keeps people working. Jobs are lost. And the burden on taxpayers grows.

It's all part of a nationwide trend. Insurance companies are trying to reduce their coverage for the healthy — and leave the sick to the public sector.

Consider the Health Insurance Association of America's latest plan for small businesses. The industry trade group's proposal won't cover pre-scriptions, doctor visits, maternity care, or your dependents. In fact, it doesn't pay for anything until you land in the hospital. The policy protects the insurance companies' profits, nothing else. And we'll all pay the price.

Refusing to cover preventative care like mammograms, the industry's plan could lead to more catastrophic illness.

The industry is asking states to suspend their standards for health plans. But the real answer is to expand the system. For example, legislation endorsed by Governor Cuomo would:

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representing seven Eurocurrencies, climbing Mont Blanc. They're tied together by ropes, representing agreements to keep their exchange rates within a narrow range of one another—plus or minus 2.25 percent of agreed parities. Two newcomers, the Spanish peseta and the British pound, are attached to the rest by elastic bands: their range is a wider 6 percent in either direction. And two more stragglers, the Greek drachma and the Portuguese escudo, remain unattached. At present the lengths of rope and elastic—i.e., the exchange rate parities—can still be adjusted if someone is straining at the leash or dragging his feet. But adjustments are increasingly frowned upon; and by January 1994, according to the new plan, the ropes and bands will have become chains linking the climbers together so inflexibly that it will no longer make sense for them to exert themselves as individuals.

Instead they'll pool their resources and build a ski-lift: a European central bank. The pound, deutschmark, franc, lira, peseta, guilder, crown, punt, drachma, and escudo all will linger on for a time with their eccentric denominations and colorful representations of obscure historical personages. But they will be mere passengers on the lift. Their issue will be regulated not by national banks of issue but by the new central bank (possibly called the "Eurofed," after the one in the United States), which will treat them as mere regional varieties of the new European currency (probably called the ECU, short for European Currency Unit, which already exists as a unit of account). It will be much like the present situation in Scotland, where the Scottish banks can still print their own picturesque notes, but only as substitutes for existing Bank of England currency.

In essence, there are three arguments for the move. The first is that it will reduce the costs of trade between the EC countries, as European traders and investors no longer have to convert from one currency to another. The second is that monetary unity will lower inflation in other EC countries to the low levels achieved by West Germany. The third argument for EMU is that it will help accelerate EC political union. Americans have reason to be sympathetic to all these aims. What, after all, could possibly be wrong with a stabler foreign exchange market, lower inflation, and greater political integration in Western Europe, with American-style institutions replacing the quarrelsome nation-states of old? Well, take the arguments one at a time.

The first, trade-stimulating theory, sounds plausible, but it's hard to put a figure on what would be saved by ending currency transactions, and harder still to guess how much more trade would be generated, since intra-EC trade is already enormous and the removal of all internal trade barriers by next year will make it bigger still. From the point of view of business, a Eurocurrency ends the uncertainty of predicting currency movements, but it also removes all those opportunities for playing the market, and reduces the range of currencies (and interest rates) that companies can choose for their short- or long-term assets and liabilities.

The second argument—the anti-inflation theory—is trickier. Imposing low inflation through fixed exchange rates or currency union can exact a heavy toll. The pre-1914 gold standard—in reality a sterling standard that hinged on Britain's role as a huge capital exporter and importer of foreign goods—produced a legendary recession, provoking protests like the American populist William Jennings Bryan's cry that the common people were being "crucified on a cross of gold." (The gold standard didn't even deliver price stability. From the mid-1870s to the mid-1890s prices fell, only to rise thereafter.) Sharper pangs were caused by the attempts after the First World War to restore fixed exchange rates based on the gold standard—notably in Britain, where Churchill tried to return sterling to its pre-war rate against the dollar, generating mass unemployment and civil unrest. The contemporary parallel is with Spain, which now pays for EMS membership with interest rates of more than 16 percent and unemployment of 15 percent.

Full-fledged currency unions can be as grueling as fixed exchange rate schemes. Take eastern Germany, where the incorporation of the German Democratic Republic into the West German monetary system since July 1990 has been, in the words of the former Bundesbank President Karl-Otto Pöhl last month, "a disaster." GNP fell 15 percent—and is still falling—in the east in 1990; unemployment there could rise as high as 40 percent by the end of this year.

The problem is that removing exchange rate flexibility removes a relatively painless form of adjustment between regional and national economies. Differentials in competitiveness can no longer be softened by exchange rate shifts. As happened in Germany, firms in the weaker economy simply cannot compete in the same monetary system. To attract labor they have to match western wages; but their productivity levels are too low to produce competitively priced goods. The only options are liquidation or massive investment. The IMF's latest figures suggest that as much as 170 billion deutschmarks would have to be invested every year for the next ten years to put east German industry back in the running.

Even then, low inflation isn't guaranteed. True, the EMS members had slightly lower inflation than six non-EMS European economies in the first six years of its existence (8.3 percent compared with 8.8 percent); and the latest figures on consumer price increases in the EMS countries (excluding the UK) show only a modest spread ranging from 2.4 percent (Holland) to 6.7 percent (Italy). But there's a proviso, often overlooked by EMS enthusiasts: inflation in a fixed exchange rate system can only be as low as that of the key currency. (Bretton Woods, after all, actually spread global inflation in the 1960s, as the United States printed money to finance its wars against Vietnam and domestic poverty.)

Until recently it was an article of Euro-faith that the

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EMS had a secure anchor, the deutschmark, and that the ECU would inherit its stability. But that assumption can no longer be sustained. The strain of unification is bringing an end to West Germany's era of parsimonious productivity. Even with new taxes totaling DM40 billion, the German deficit for this year is still likely to top DM150 billion. At more than 4 percent of GNP, that out-Reagans Reagan. Suddenly the markets have cottoned onto the problem. News of collapse in the East, the disappearance of West Germany's trade surplus, wage pressure in the West, the assassination of the man in charge of East German privatization, election setbacks for Chancellor Kohl, and most recently the resignation of Pöhl—all this has finally undermined confidence in the deutschmark. The anchor shows signs of slipping.

So much for the economic arguments. But will a move to a single currency help political integration? Not necessarily. There's no inherent connection between monetary and political union, especially where federal states like the projected United States of Europe are concerned. The United States of America thrived in the nineteenth century with a monetary system that verged on the anarchic; so great were suspicions of central banks that the Federal Reserve system did not come into being until 1913. The federal German Reich developed a national currency only *after* it had been politically unified by Bismarck's victories over Austria and France. Even then its monetary policy was controlled by the gold standard (a monetary system that certainly didn't promote political convergence). When that control was removed in 1914, the German currency self-destructed within ten years.

The truth about a system as rigid and centralized as a monetary union is that it *presupposes* a very high degree of political integration. If it's to work, two things are necessary: a central authority to control federal taxing and spending; and a common political culture to help the less developed regions endure their painful adjustment. Neither of these now exists in the EC. The community's ability to tax and spend is still tiny (its budget is a fifth of Britain's alone), and there is enormous disagreement over member states' fiscal discipline. The common political culture is still decades away.

Already reality is beginning to break through the rhetoric. The Germans, beset by their own problems, want to postpone the creation of Eurofed until 1997. The British, worried about coming elections, want to agree to the principle without committing themselves to the practice. The Mediterranean countries are nervous about the thought of fiscal retrenchment. Meanwhile, the Scandinavian and Eastern European countries are demanding membership in the existing EMU-less EC. The truth is that the economic advantages of EMU—compared with what would be gained by simply expanding the existing EC free trade area—are minimal, and the political problems are likely to prove insuperable. The Monopoly money is likely to be around for some time yet.

NIALL FERGUSON is a fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge.

Capital punishment: what really happens.

THIS IS YOUR DEATH

By Jacob Weisberg

Thanks to the decision of a California district judge last week, the American public has been spared the spectacle of criminals being executed on television. But the lawsuit, filed by KQED, the public television station in San Francisco, still served a useful function. It reminded people not only that the United States remains the only advanced democracy that executes criminals, but that it is the only country in the world with a grotesque array of execution techniques worth televising. A century ago Americans knew full well what it meant for the state to hang someone from the end of a rope. Today, thanks to the century-long search for a more "humane" method, we know little about the range of practices that would be featured on the execution channel.

Of the five means of execution still extant in the United States, the oldest is hanging, which was nearly universal before 1900. The gallows was last used in Kansas in 1965 and remains an option in Delaware, Montana, and Washington State. If a hanging were ever televised, viewers would see the blindfolded prisoner standing on a trap door with a rope fastened around his neck, the knot under his left ear. So long as he is hooded, it is impossible to know for how long after the trap door opens the victim suffers, or at what point he loses consciousness. But according

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to Harold Hillman, a British physiologist who has studied executions, the dangling person feels cervical pain, and probably suffers from an acute headache as well, a result of the rope closing off the veins of the neck.

In the opinion of Dr. Cornelius Rosse, the chairman of the Department of Anatomy at the University of Washington School of Medicine, the belief that fracture of the spinal cord causes instantaneous death is wrong in all but a small fraction of cases. The actual cause of death is strangulation or suffocation. In medical terms, the weight of the prisoner's body causes tearing of the cervical muscles, skin, and blood vessels. The upper cervical vertebrae are dislocated, and the spinal cord is separated from the brain, which causes death.

Clinton Duffy, the warden at San Quentin from 1942 to 1954, who participated in sixty hangings, described his first thus:

> The man hit bottom and I observed that he was fighting by pulling on the straps, wheezing, whistling, trying to get air, that blood was oozing through the black cap. I observed also that he urinated, defecated, and droppings fell on the floor, and the stench was terrible. I also saw witnesses pass out and have to be carried from the witness room. Some of them threw up.

It took ten minutes for the condemned man to die. When he was taken down and the cap removed, "big hunks of flesh were torn off" the side of his face where the noose had been, "his eyes were popped," and his tongue was "swollen and hanging from his mouth." His face had also turned purple. The annals of Walla Walla State Penitentiary in Washington, which was seeking to hire an executioner in 1988 when Charles Campbell obtained a stay of execution, are filled with horror stories: prisoners partially decapitated by overlong drops, or pleading with hangmen to take them up and drop them again.

Almost as rare as hanging—but still around—is the firing squad. Gary Gilmore, who was shot in Utah in 1977, was the last to die by this method, which remains an option only there and in Idaho. Gilmore was bound to a chair with leather straps across his waist and head, in front of an oval-shaped canvas wall. A black hood was pulled over his head. A doctor then located his heart with a stethoscope and pinned a circular white cloth target over it. Five shooters armed with .30-caliber rifles loaded with single rounds (one of them blank to spare the conscience of the executioners) stood in an enclosure twenty feet away. Each man aimed his rifle through a slot in the canvas and fired.

Though shooting through the head at close range causes nearly instantaneous death, a prisoner subjected to a firing squad dies as a result of blood loss caused by rupture of the heart or a large blood vessel, or tearing of the lungs. The person shot loses consciousness when shock causes a fall in the supply of blood to the brain. If the shooters miss, by accident or intention, the prisoner bleeds to death slowly, as Elisio J. Mares did in Utah in 1951. It took Gilmore two minutes to die.

It was to mitigate the barbarism of these primitive methods that New York introduced the electric chair in 1890 as a humane alternative. Eighty-three people have been electrocuted since the Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment in 1976, making the method the most common one now in use. It is probably the most gruesome to watch. After being led into the death chamber, the prisoner is strapped to the chair with belts that cross his chest, groin, legs, and arms. Two copper electrodes are then attached: one to his leg, a patch of which will have been shaved bare to reduce resistance to electricity, and another to his shaved head. The electrodes are either soaked in brine or treated with gel (Electro-Creme) to increase conductivity and reduce burning. The prisoner will also be wearing a diaper.

The executioner gives a first jolt of between 500 and 2,000 volts, which lasts for thirty seconds. Smoke usually comes out of the prisoner's leg and head. A doctor then examines him. If he's not dead, another jolt is applied. A third and fourth are given if needed to finish the job. It took five jolts to kill Ethel Rosenberg. In the grisly description of Justice Brennan:

> . . . the prisoner's eyeballs sometimes pop out and rest on [his] cheeks. The prisoner often defecates, urinates, and vomits blood and drool. The body turns bright red as its temperature rises, and the prisoner's flesh swells and his skin stretches to the point of breaking. Sometimes the prisoner catches on fire, particularly if [he] perspires excessively. Witnesses hear a loud and sustained sound like bacon frying, and the sickly sweet smell of burning flesh permeates the chamber.

An electrocuted corpse is hot enough to blister if touched. Thus autopsy must be delayed while internal organs cool. According to Robert H. Kirschner, the deputy chief medical examiner of Cook County, Illinois, "The brain appears cooked in most cases."

There is some debate about what the electrocuted prisoner experiences before he dies, but most doctors I spoke to believe that he feels himself being burned to death and suffocating, since the shock causes respiratory paralysis as well as cardiac arrest. According to Hillman, "It must feel very similar to the medieval trial by ordeal of being dropped in boiling oil." Because the energy of the shock paralyzes the prisoner's muscles, he cannot cry out. "My mouth tasted like cold peanut butter. I felt a burning in my head and my left leg, and I jumped against the straps," Willie Francis, a 17-year-old who survived an attempted execution in 1946, is reported to have said. Francis was successfully executed a year later.

Though all methods of execution can be botched, electrocutions go wrong frequently and dramatically, in part because the equipment is old and hard to repair. At least five have gone awry since 1983. If the electrical current is too weak, the prisoner roasts to death slowly. An instance of this was the May 4, 1990, killing of Jesse Joseph Tafero in Florida. According to witnesses, when the executioner flipped the switch, flames and smoke

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came out of Tafero's head, which was covered by a mask and cap. Twelve-inch blue and orange flames sprouted from both sides of the mask. The power was stopped, and Tafero took several deep breaths. The superintendent ordered the executioner to halt the current, then try it again. And again.

The affidavits presented for an internal inquiry into what went wrong describe the bureaucratization of the death penalty brilliantly. In the words of one of the officials:

> . . . while working in the Death Chamber, proceeding with the execution as scheduled, I received an indication from Mr. Barton to close my electric breaker. I then told the executioner to close his electric breaker. When the executioner completed the circuit, I noticed unusual fire and smoke coming from the inmate's headpiece. After several seconds, I received an indication to open the electrical breaker to stop the electrical flow. At this time, I noticed the body move as if to be gasping for air. After several seconds, I received the indication to close the breaker the second time, which I did. Again, I noticed the unusual fire and smoke coming from the headpiece. After several seconds, I received the third indication to close the breaker, and again, the fire and smoke came from the headpiece . . .

And so on. Apparently a synthetic sponge, soaked in brine, had been substituted for the natural one applied to Tafero's head. This reduced the flow of electricity to as little as one hundred volts, and ended up torturing the prisoner to death. According to the state prison medical director, Frank Kligo, who attended, it was "less than aesthetically attractive."

Advanced technology does not always make the death penalty less painful to undergo or more pleasant to watch. The gas chamber, which was invented by an army medical corps officer after World War I, was first introduced as a humane alternative to the electric chair in 1924 in Nevada. The original idea, which proved impracticable, was to surprise the prisoner by gassing him in his cell without prior warning. Seven states, including California, still use the gas chamber. The most recent fatality was Leo Edwards, a 36-year-old who was killed in Jackson County, Mississippi, in 1989.

Had KQED won its suit, millions of viewers would have joined a dozen live witnesses in seeing Robert Alton Harris, who murdered two teenage boys in San Diego in 1978, led into a green, octagonal room in the basement of San Quentin Penitentiary. Inside the chamber are two identical metal chairs with perforated seats, marked "A" and "B." The twin chairs were last used in a double execution in 1962. If Harris's execution goes ahead this year or next, two orderlies will fasten him into chair A, attaching straps across his upper and lower legs, arms, groin, and chest. They will also affix a long stethoscope to Harris's chest so that a doctor on the outside can pronounce death.

Beneath the chair is a bowl filled with sulfuric acid mixed with distilled water, with a pound of sodium cyanide pellets suspended in a gauze bag just above. After the door is sealed, and when the warden gives the signal, an executioner in a separate room flicks a lever that releases the cyanide into the liquid. This causes a chemical reaction that releases hydrogen cyanide gas, which rises through the holes in the chair. Like most death row prisoners, Harris is likely to have been reduced to a state of passive acquiescence by his years on death row, and will probably follow the advice of the warden to breathe deeply as soon as he smells rotten eggs. As long as he holds his breath nothing will happen. But as soon as he inhales, according to the testimony of Duffy, the former warden, Harris will lose consciousness in a few seconds. "At first there is evidence of extreme horror, pain, and strangling. The eyes pop. The skin turns purple and the victim begins to drool. It is a horrible sight," he testified.

In medical terms, victims of cyanide gas die from hypoxia, which means the cut-off of oxygen to the brain. The initial result of this is spasms, as in an epileptic seizure. Because of the straps, however, involuntary body movements are restrained. Seconds after he first inhales, Harris will feel himself unable to breathe, but will not lose consciousness immediately. "The person is unquestionably experiencing pain and extreme anxiety," according to Dr. Richard Traystman of Johns Hopkins. "The pain begins immediately and is felt in the arms, shoulders, back, and chest. The sensation is similar to the pain felt by a person during a heart attack, where essentially the heart is being deprived of oxygen." Traystman adds: "We would not use asphyxiation, by cyanide gas or by any other substance, in our laboratory to kill animals that have been used in experiments."

Harris will stop wriggling after ten or twelve minutes, and the doctor will pronounce him dead. An exhaust fan then sucks the poison air out of the chamber. Next the corpse is sprayed with ammonia, which neutralizes traces of the cyanide that may remain. After about half an hour, orderlies enter the chamber, wearing gas masks and rubber gloves. Their training manual advises them to ruffle the victim's hair to release any trapped cyanide gas before removing him.

Thanks to these grotesqueries, states are increasingly turning to lethal injection. This method was imagined for decades (by Ronald Reagan, among others, when he was governor of California in 1973), but was technically invented in 1977 by Dr. Stanley Deutsch, who at the time chaired the Anesthesiology Department at Oklahoma University Medical School. In response to a call by an Oklahoma state senator for a cheaper alternative to repairing the state's delict electric chair, Deutsch described a way to administer drugs through an intravenous drip so as to cause death rapidly and without pain. "Having been anesthetized on several occasions with ultra short-acting barbiturates and having administered these drugs for approximately 20 years, I can assure you that this is a rapid, pleasant way of producing unconsciousness," Deutsch wrote to state senator Bill Dawson in February 1977. The method was promptly adopted in Oklahoma, and is now either the exclusive method or an option in half of the thirty-six

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states with death penalty laws. It is becoming the method of choice around the country because it is easier on both the witnesses and the prisoner.

A recent injectee was Lawrence Lee Buxton, who was killed in Huntsville, Texas, on February 26. Buxton was strapped to a hospital gurney, built with an extension panel for his left arm. Technicians stuck a catheter needle into Buxton's arm. Long tubes connected the needle through a hole in a cement block wall to several intravenous drips. The first, which was started immediately, dispensed harmless saline solution. Then, at the warden's signal, a curtain went up, which permitted the witnesses—reporters and friends of the soon-to-be deceased—to view the scene. Unlike some prisoners, Buxton did not have a long wait before the warden received a call from the governor's office, giving the final go-ahead.

According to Lawrence Egbert, an anesthesiologist at the University of Texas in Dallas who has campaigned against lethal injection as a perversion of medical practice, the first drug administered was sodium thiopental, a common barbiturate used as an anesthetic, which puts patients quickly to sleep. A normal dose for a long operation is 1,000 milligrams; Buxton got twice that. As soon as he lost consciousness, the executioner administered pavulon, another common muscle relaxant used in heart surgery. The dose was 100 milligrams, ten times the usual, which stops the prisoner's breathing. This would have killed him in about ten minutes; to speed the process, an equal dose of potassium chloride was subsequently administered. This is another drug commonly used in bypass surgery that relaxes the heart and stops it pumping. It works in about ten seconds. All witnesses heard was the prisoner take a deep breath, then a gurgling noise as his tongue dropped back in his mouth. Watt Espy, who has compiled a list of 17,718 executions in America, from the early period of drownings, burnings, sawings-in-half, pressings-to-death, and even the crucifixions of two mutinous Continental Army soldiers, compares lethal injection to the way a devoted owner treats "a faithful dog he's loved and cherished."

The only physical pain, if the killing is done correctly, "is the pain of the initial prick of the needle," according to Traystman. There are, however, some potential hitches. Since doctors are precluded by medical ethics from participating in executions, except to pronounce death, the injections are often performed by incompetent or inexperienced technicians. If a death worker injects the drugs into muscle instead of a vein, or if the needle becomes clogged, extreme pain can result. This is what happened when James Autry was killed in 1984 in Texas. *Newsweek* reported that he "took at least ten minutes to die and throughout much of that time was conscious, moving about, and complaining of pain." Many prisoners have damaged veins from injecting drugs intravenously, and technicians sometimes struggle to find a serviceable one. When Texas executed Stephen Morin, a former heroin addict, orderlies prodded his arms with catheters for forty-one minutes. Being strapped to a table for a lengthy period while waiting to die is a form of psychological torture arguably worse than most physical kinds. This is demonstrated by the fact that mock executions, which cause no physical pain, are a common method of torture around the world. The agony comes not from the prospect of pain, but from the expectation of death.

Televised executions would mark the reversal of the process described in Louis P. Masur's *Rites of Execution* and Robert Johnson's *Death Work*, whereby executions have been removed further and further from the community that compels them. Through the eighteenth century, executions were atavistic spectacles performed in full public view. In the nineteenth they were moved inside the prison yard and witnessed by only a few. In the twentieth century, executions moved deep inside the bowels of prisons, where they were performed ever more quickly and quietly to attract minimal notice. American death penalty opponents in the 1800s supported the abolition of public executions as a way-station to ending all executions. They thought that eliminating the grossest manifestations of public barbarism would inevitably lead to the end of capital punishment as an institution. The reform had the opposite effect, however. Invisible executions shocked the sensibilities of fewer people, and dampened the momentum of the reform movement.

Those abolitionists who now support televising executions have absorbed this historical lesson. They want to bring back the equivalent of public executions in order to shock the public into opposing all executions. They hope to accomplish with pictures what Arthur Koestler did with words in his 1955 tract *Reflections on Hanging*, the publication of which led to the abolition of the rope in Great Britain in 1969.

But advances in the art of killing may have deprived them of that tactic. The prospect of televised executions is likely to accelerate the trend away from grisly methods and toward ever more hermetic ways of dispatching wrongdoers. Had the KQED suit been successful, Henry Schwarzschild, a retired ACLU death penalty expert, speculates that California would have responded by quickly joining the national trend toward lethal injection.

Michael Kroll of the Death Penalty Information Center objects to televising executions for exactly this reason. He argues that a video camera would capture only a "very antiseptic moment at the end of a very septic process." With the advent of death by the needle, execution itself is becoming so denatured and mechanistic as to be unshocking even to most live witnesses. This throws death penalty opponents back upon a less vivid, but more compelling case: that it is punishing people with death, not the manner in which they are killed, that is the true issue here; that capital punishment is to be opposed not simply because it is cruel, but because it is wrong. ●

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Two for the Road

When Ridley Scott directs a film, the viewer's eye is in for a treat, whatever else happens. The man who made *The Duellists* (a Napoleonic charade), *Alien* (sci-fi horror as aesthetics), and *Blade Runner* (the future as claustrophobic design) wants to reach motion pictures through pictures. In *Someone to Watch Over Me* Scott showed how he could bend present-day New York to his stylistic will. In **Thelma and Louise** (MGM) he again shows how he can make the modern world—this time the American Southwest—deliver up visual treasures.

Scott, who is British, here uses a British cinematographer, Adrian Biddle. Together they shred yet again the myth that only natives can "see" a landscape. The very first sequence under the titles is a series of long shots of buttes, changing moods in the changing light in a way that blends grandeur and the human perception of it. Together they treat automobile headlights and taillights like corpuscles crowding through the dark American arterial system of highways.

The screenplay is a debut by Callie Khouri, who also served as co-producer. (She has produced MTV.) The theme is female bonding, which, even more than male bonding, is—understandably—bonding against the opposite sex. In an Arkansas town, Thelma is a young and smilingly subservient wife, married to an ego-drunk successful man who orders her about and who comes home when he pleases. She goes off for a fishing weekend in the mountains with Louise, a waitress in a local diner. (Thelma doesn't even dare ask her husband for permission: she leaves a note in the microwave with the dinner he's to warm up.) Louise, whose live-in companion is more congenial, is older than her friend, more competent, and has insisted that Thelma take this breather from her harried married life.

We know from the start that the weekend won't go as planned, or the picture would not have been made. (Also, there are antecedents in female adventure, such as Scorsese's *Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More* and Tanner's *Messidor.*) The two women set out in Louise's convertible, gleeful at their escape from men, from routine, from all sorts of order. They then encounter different sorts of disorder.

Early on, they stop for a drink at a roadside bar, where Thelma gets entangled in a parking lot with a would-be rapist. Louise kills the man—with Thelma's pistol. (Actually, she stops the rape attempt at gun point; then, as the two women are leaving, Louise shoots the man because he insults her vilely. This denotes an important difference; the person can be insulted, we're told, as well as the body.) The killing propels the film. The story then proceeds to close off the chances for the fleeing pair—first, to escape, then to trust in legal process and a possible return to prior life.

Yet the prevailing tone is comic, manically so. This is the film's chief difference from a classic twentieth-century structure, the expressionist drama in which a run-of-the-mill person gets catapulted out of the mill into a highly charged flight through another kind of life. (Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, for a prime example.) Comedy has no part in it.

Another difference. Khouri's screenplay, laced though it is with pungent, often funny dialogue, is burdened with contrivances. First, the pistol. When Thelma shows Louise her husband's pistol, which she doesn't know how to use, and makes a lame excuse for bringing it on the trip, we know that the gun is somehow going to be used as sure as (let's say) shooting. Then there's the stop for a drink. It's hard to believe that they would do this when they have a long trip ahead of them—especially the hardheaded Louise, who is driving. It's even harder to believe that Thelma would let herself get tipsy so quickly, would so quickly cling to a man who asked her to dance, and would then so easily go outside with him—for a breath of air. (And by this time, it's dark.) The plot goes creak creak creak.

Later Louise's lover brings to a motel, as she has asked, her whole life savings, $6,700. The women desperately need this cash for their getaway. For no credible reason, Louise then gives it to Thelma to keep in her room. Why? Thelma leaves it on the night-table next to the bed while she entertains a stranger who, of course, makes off with it. More plot creaking. Thelma is supposed to be feather-headed, but Khouri piles so much on her that very soon we're aware that contrivance is being

FILMS WORTH SEEING

An Angel at My Table. *The life of a New Zealand writer, as dramatized by a New Zealand filmmaker, Jane Campion. Vigorous, open, humane.(Reviewed 6/3/91)* **The Comfort of Strangers.** *Harold Pinter's screenplay, from Ian McEwan's novel, has the spookiness and ultimate flaws of the book. But this Eros-Thanatos story set in Venice is excellently acted and directed.(4/29/91)* **Truly, Madly, Deeply.** *Rising above the eventual slush of this screenplay, about a bereaved woman in London, is the superb acting of Juliet Stevenson and some others.(5/27/91)* **Truth or Dare.** *Madonna bares nearly all—of herself and her life. Exhibitionism made (almost) authentic in a fast-paced documentary. (6/10/91)* **—SK**

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passed off as character—to render the pair desperately broke. It's hard to believe that the shrewd Louise could have been friends with anyone as dumb as Thelma is shown to be. Thus, what was meant to be a fated descent into the maelstrom becomes a patent piece of engineering.

Nonetheless, allowing for the creaks and bumps, *Thelma and Louise* gives us much to savor. Susan Sarandon, straight from the waitress in *White Palace*, takes that waitress out for a different trip. The differences between this waitress and the last one have been exaggerated by some: the real difference is in the situation. I hope that Sarandon will really change roles next time out. Meanwhile, she does this one with her usual air of a somewhat amused veteran of life.

Geena Davis, as Thelma, is a surprise. In *The Accidental Tourist* she gave a quite conventional performance, overpraised because of the role's quirks. Here it's as if the Davis iris had opened up to reveal unsuspected colors. She has had help from two sources. Scott has surely led her to find those colors. And Biddle, who does wonders with Monument Valley and the Grand Canyon, also finds planes in Davis's face, contours of delight and fear that become integral to the film.

Harvey Keitel follows his detective in *Mortal Thoughts* with another detective, Arkansas-accented. Brad Pitt, as a spuriously well-behaved hitchhiker who wriggles his way into Thelma's confidence, makes his wriggling the right spurious con. But the best male performance comes from Christopher McDonald as Thelma's unbearable husband. Actors of repellent roles often get short shrift. A little longer shrift for McDonald: his talent makes the husband a comically self-infatuated nuisance.

Scott does some deft sketching of Americana as his story unwinds: a crop-dusting plane buzzes the women's car; at a particularly grubby filling station, a weight-lifter works out in the background; at another, a couple of tired saddle horses are hitched not far from the gas pump. And Scott does well with a matter that is often sloughed off: when his principals in the foreground are doing something visible or are speaking loudly, people in the background really see and hear them.

Anger—that's the simmering element beneath this film, women's anger. The wild ride of Thelma and Louise was meant to be a vicarious release for all women who feel anger at the world of men. But though there are bull's-eyes along the way, the film's artifices clutter up its original honest intent. ●

The Vanities of Patriotism

BY PAUL BERMAN

A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs by Theodore Draper

(Hill & Wang, 690 pp., $27.95)

Opening Arguments A Young Lawyer's First Case: United States v. Oliver North by Jeffrey Toobin

(Viking, 374 pp., $22.95)

My favorite story from the Iran-contra affair is the one about Ebrohim bin Aboul-Aziz bin Saud al-Massoudi, a Saudi "prince of Jedda," who convinced Oliver North and Bud McFarlane that he was going to free the American hostages and donate $14 million to the contras—if he got a little help with an American oil deal. So they helped. But the prince wasn't a prince. He was apparently not even a Saudi. He was an impostor. His checks bounced. By the time the story got straightened out and the prince found his natural home in a Swiss jail, the cost to the contras surpassed—but this, in my estimation, was the *good* side of the prince of Jedda—a solid $367,000.

Prince Ebrohim bin Aboul-Aziz bin Saud al-Massoudi played his little role on the Washington stage in 1984-5, before the Iran-contra affair (or affairs, as Theodore Draper prefers) got fully under way. Still, as Draper slyly hints, the prince had already sketched out the main features to come. Rubes from the hills were running the National Security Council; anybody with a Middle Eastern accent and a wild enough tale had access to the president's highest circles; Tom Sawyer's fantasies about A-rabs were policy; watch your wallets, folks; it was the Larry, Moe, and Curly show, as the CIA's man in Costa Rica observed. It was, I mean, the Age of Reagan. And in the following months, the Ebrohim bin Aboul-Aziz bin Saud al-Massoudi factor in White House undertakings (henceforth Factor EbAAbSaM) did not exactly diminish. The factor grew. It became systemic.

How else to explain, except by invoking Factor EbAAbSaM, the concept of "tin-cup diplomacy" that represented one of Reaganism's greatest innovations in American foreign policy? Or how else to explain the bookkeeping that took $10 million from the Sultan of Brunei and lost them? Or Richard Secord's error in dispatching secret funds to Liberia, Africa, instead of to Liberia, Costa Rica? Or Spitz Channell's fund-raising that brought in $12 million, but devoted more than $9 million to expenses (including the money that ended in the hands of the impostor prince)? How to explain, except by Factor EbAAbSaM, North's discreet airlift of ransom to Iran, in November 1985, which aroused authorities in Portugal, Cyprus, and Turkey? Or the plane's arrival in Tehran carrying the wrong number of the wrong missiles? At the wrong prices? With Israeli markings!

Some of the better Iran-contra stories are little known and don't even appear in Draper's monumental account, yet show EbAAbSaM at its grandest. There is the story of the *Pia Vesta*, for instance, which displayed once again North's talent for shipping secret arms, this time to Central America. The *Pia Vesta* was a Danish ship, which North arranged with Manuel Noriega to charter and load with rifles, grenade launchers, ammunition, and thirty-two military vehicles. Contras in gunboats were supposed to capture the *Pia Vesta* on its ostensible way to the Salvadoran coast. The contras were supposed to reveal that the cargo came from Sandinista Nicaragua and was intended for the Salvadoran guerrillas, thus proving the White House case against Sandinista gun-running. Then the contras were supposed to keep the arms for themselves.

The idea was North's very definition of "neat": at a single stroke to disarm the congressional Democrats and arm the contras. Only, alas, who could have suspected that Noriega was himself, deep in his soul, a Prince of Jedda? But, yes. Factor EbAAbSaM intervened, and the pock-faced little bastard sent his own gunboats to capture the *Pia Vesta*, and he

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kept the cargo for himself, and the Panamanian army ran amok with the vehicles that people in Panama called the *Pia Vestas* (as Kevin Buckley describes in his just published *Panama: The Whole Story*), and the contras never got a single bullet.

The Iran-contra affair had the concentric structure of Dante's Hell, except that Factor EbAAbSaM was both the comic outer ring and the inner core. The entire business, anyway its Iranian half, was dreamed up, as Draper demonstrates, by Manucher Ghorbanifar, who may have been a fake and a fraud three days out of four, but was, on the day that Iran-contra got its start, authentically in the Persian rug trade (according to most of the versions that Draper has collected), just to give the affair its proper flavor. The notion that American hostages in Lebanon could be ransomed without causing further kidnappings in the future; that Ayatollah Khomeini's theocracy was tottering; that factions were fighting for power in Tehran, with moderates craving American support; that the mysteries of Iranian politics would become clear with the "good faith" delivery of some deadly American weapons—these notions came straight out of Ghorbanifar's devilish imagination, worked up with the help of a couple of friends. The idea was "Spanish Lotto," as played in the Bronx: you will be rich, if only you place $10,000 in this tiny envelope!

Yet Ghorbanifar's ideas, preposterous as they were, fit perfectly into the tin-cup innovations of American policy that were designed by McFarlane, John Poindexter, and the other can-do figures of the administration—namely the privatization of foreign policy, the true "Reagan Doctrine," which enabled the White House to pursue any whim it chose, merely by transferring Congress's constitutionally mandated financial veto power to individual millionaires, to discreet dictatorships abroad, and to the occasional arms merchant. All that remained for the Iran-contra affair to achieve its historic shape was for Ghorbanifar to detect North's heart's desire and read it back to him, which he did by whispering in a London men's room that the inflated profits from Iranian arms sales could, after all, be sent to the contras.

The absurdities that characterized Iran-contra are not unprecedented, of course, in the annals of political history. Trotsky described a similar atmosphere at the court of the Czar in 1917, in the period when the Czar, "a jolly sprightly fellow in a raspberry-colored shirt," had fallen under the political domination of the Czarina, who had fallen under the domination of Rasputin. Suetonius tells parallel tales from the court of the twelve Caesars. There is only this difference: the dynasties of the Romanovs and the Caesars ultimately collapsed, for reasons that everyone can understand, given the moral and mental tone that presided at court. But the reigning dynasty at the White House, in the wake of the prince of Jedda, did not collapse. On the contrary: the world jackpot fell due, and the heirs of Reagan are poised to rule for a thousand years.

Why should that be? It is a question. The relation between Reagan's bumblings and the good and the bad that has happened since is the greatest of all the Iran-contra mysteries, far more important and even more controversial than any of the whodunit issues of the affair itself.

The whodunit (or whodunwhat) aspect is not to be dismissed. Draper has made an exhaustive search of 50,000 pages of Iran-contra documents, and Jeffrey Toobin, as reported in his own book, spent two years as a young lawyer raking the muck for Lawrence Walsh's Office of Independent Counsel. On the basis of these researches, the possibility of new and even unsuspected bombshells suddenly turning up cannot be discounted—if only because the clouds of suspicion from the old bombshells that went off in November 1986 have never dissipated. Draper is convinced, for example, that George Bush knows more than he has ever said about Iran-contra. Toobin dryly notes that Ed Meese's memory never seemed to surpass facts for which there was written documentation. Figures like North, Elliott Abrams, and William Casey, when you read about them in these accounts, toll a sort of carillon of mendacity, from the boyish to the crafty to the pathological. So who can say what further secrets lurk in the hearts of the old Reaganites, or do not lurk there because of the horrible epidemic of memory deficiency, or lie buried in Casey's tomb?

On the other hand, nothing in what Draper and Toobin write indicates what those other revelations would be. If there was an October Surprise negotiation by Casey or others to keep the hostages locked away in Iranian jails until a more convenient moment, mightn't those talks have left some mark on the negotiations that definitely did take place five and six years later? One or two ambiguous phrases do turn up. In a memo that Draper quotes, Casey referred to an unspecified "historical precedent." But there is nothing definite, no record of Casey turning to North and advising, say, "Son, when conspiring with ayatollahs, the proper method, as I have reason to know, is to meet at such-and-such hotel in Madrid, and bring a pastry." Instead the documents show, in Draper's analysis, that the Iran side of Iran-contra began with a neoconservative writer and Washington operator named Michael A. Ledeen, who wormed his way into an influential position by convincing McFarlane that he alone, Ledeen, knew a good way to contact the unreachable Iranian elite via Ghorbanifar.

Draper's story, backed by Toobin's, more or less conforms to the account that we have known ever since the House and Senate hearings of 1986-7. Draper adds depth and perspective, of course, and a number of corrections. He shows that Reagan loomed larger in the affair than is usually claimed, that the president played an active, not a passive, role in the crucial decisions and meetings, even if Poindexter protected him from the simple small decision to link the ransom and the contra policy. Casey, on the other hand, looms less prominently in Draper's account. Draper doubts that Casey genuinely wanted to create an "off-the-shelf" CIA, as has been charged. The CIA director was dying, after all, during the most important months. "It can be said with some confidence," Draper concludes, "that Casey was not the driving force in the Iran-contra affairs, at least not in 1986, and that the closer we get to the climax, the less he had to do with it." Instead the driving forces were North and his two bosses at the National Security Council, McFarlane and Poindexter. The national security advisers managed to win Reagan to their own arguments, and to defeat the nay-sayers and doubters of the Cabinet, George Shultz and Caspar Weinberger, who look pretty ineffective in Draper's account.

Mostly Draper tries to establish how such scandals could have happened in the first place, what the chain of command looked like, how the structures worked or failed to work. The approach is procedural. The House and Senate investigative committees had the same instinct, and ran at once to discover the ways in which the proper order of authority had been flouted, the deceptions that had been committed against Congress, the ways in which concord between the White House and the Hill was broken—all as if a proper arrangement of power and the right rules would have made such scandals impossible. Draper differs merely by sinking his teeth in a lot deeper, and refusing to let go, and dragging the bleeding corpse of the affair through a full 700 pages, until every last drop of procedural information has been wrung from it.

The picture does at last become clear. A crippling double struggle went on for

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control over foreign policy. There was a struggle between the executive and the Congress—with the executive wanting to get around little inconveniences like the Intelligence Oversight Act, the Foreign Military Sales Act, the Arms Export Control Act, the Foreign Assistance Act, and of course Congress's mandate, codified in the Boland Amendment and signed into law by the president, to withdraw American support for the contra war. And there was a struggle within the executive between the secretary of state and the national security adviser, an old struggle by now, which was itself shaped by a series of misnomers and misconceptions about the National Security Council and its structure and authority. These parallel struggles went on within the Reagan Administration, but they had also gone on within other administrations ever since Harry Truman set up the National Security Council in 1947. And after forty years of double struggle, the results were unmistakable.

The White House wrested power away from the Congress. The National Security Council wrested power away from the departments of State and Defense. The national security adviser wrested power away from the National Security Council (which includes the secretaries of state and defense). The assistant to the national security adviser wrested power away from the national security adviser. And finally, because North was a busy man, random individuals like one Albert Hakim, businessman, were left alone to sit with representatives of the government of Iran and invent policies for the government of the United States and offer them as solemn secret commitments, e.g., the commitment to go to war against the Soviet Union in case of a Soviet invasion of Iran.

Since ours is a constitutional system, Draper is entirely right in summing up the whole affair as a constitutional crisis—a very grave one that has been extended over several generations and that is likely to turn acute again in the future, due to the general unwillingness to confront the many procedural issues and questions of constitutional philosophy. But at exactly what point did the tensions between Washington agencies veer into an authentic constitutional crisis? Where precisely did the procedure stray across the line from bumbling incompetence into outright illegality?

Toobin spent a year on Walsh's team trying to discover where that point was, in order to level charges and bring the culprits to trial. But analyzing the affair with the tools of criminal law proved to be extremely difficult. Walsh's team eventually convicted North of giving Congress a false chronology of events, of shredding documents, and of erecting a security gate on his driveway in a corrupt way—which is to say, as Toobin sums it up, of "lying, cheating, and stealing." These are exactly the sort of crimes that juries like to punish. Yet these crimes never did quite fit the affair. North's driveway gate, for instance, the product of the stealing, was never, by S&L standards, a very grand example of corruption. Even North's second-to-worst enemies can agree that, due to his worst enemies, he deserved to have a gate. Everyone else among the people in a position to do so seemed to profiteer from the affair; but not North, at least not especially. Nor are the charges holding up, given the impossible juridical advantages that North's lawyer won for him in exchange for what ought to have been his simple civic duty to inform the public about the disasters he had wreaked.

Toobin worked enthusiastically, even gleefully, at trying to turn up similar charges against Elliott Abrams, who was, of all the Iran-contra figures, the easiest to hate, mostly because the cleverness that radiated from his face made him look like the cat that ate the canary. Yet Toobin had to conclude that "Elliott Abrams's dissembling before Congress well earned him derision and contempt. But not jail." In fact, nobody is likely to end up in jail as a result of Iran-contra, unless some new information comes to light. The reason is that jail is reserved for people who cross thick lines, not thin ones. One of Toobin's colleagues pointed out that no one was ever going to cry, "Officer, arrest that man, he's violating the Boland Amendment!"

Draper tells us that Ed Meese, in late November 1986, when North's memo about turning the profits from Iranian arms sales over to the contras surfaced (in spite of the frantic shredding), went into a panic about President Reagan getting impeached. The attorney general wasn't wrong, of course, about the "diversion" being the scandalous *coup de grâce*. The little hyphen between Iran and contra was a bombshell. Still, as Draper observes, while the "diversion" certainly looked bad, and had something of Fawn Hall's demeanor as she stuffed documents under her skirt to keep them out of the hands of Walsh's investigators, nothing about forwarding the profits from Iranian arms deals to the account of Adolfo Calero was inherently more illegal than anything else in the affair.

The effort to describe the terribleness of White House behavior by means of law, the procedural and constitutional approach to the scandal, the reliance on

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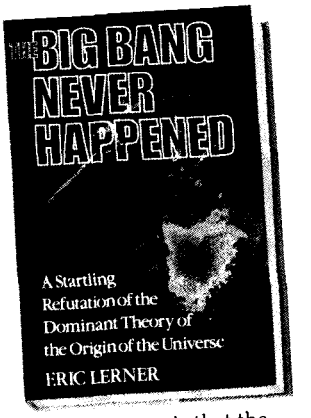

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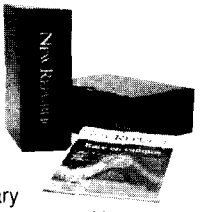

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prosecutors, and on prosecutor-like authors: all this appeals to the deepest instinct of freedom-loving people everywhere, which is, of course, litigious. Outraged? Sue! But the long arm of legalism will never get to the bottom of the affair at hand, because Iran-contra was not, in the last analysis, an outbreak of criminality, à la Teapot Dome. It was an outbreak of fanaticism, not to mention an outbreak of imbecility.

What good are laws and statutes against a man conducting a crusade? If the top figures of the government are determined to get their way in the belief that duty absolutely requires it, if the president and his advisers insist on bending the rules, how will mere procedural regulations hold them back? The Constitution is not necessarily intended to constrain the government under every possible circumstance.

To say, along with Oliver Wendell Holmes, that the Constitution is not a suicide pact means, if we are to be frank, that a little stretching of constitutional duty now and then cannot be ruled out. An occasional high-minded departure from normal legality may even be the soul of conservative reason, perhaps even the genius of our stable system—if the circumstances are sufficiently extraordinary, and if the practical results can justify the shady methods. Draper himself concedes that Lincoln had reason to stretch the Constitution in the Civil War (to shut up the Copperheads) and that Franklin Roosevelt had reason in the early years of World War II (to send arms to Britain), given that, in both cases, the survival of the country was at stake. Naturally Draper hastens to add that Reagan faced no such emergency in 1985-6, and that the comparison to Lincoln and Roosevelt is absurd.

Still, not everybody agrees. This, and not the debate over which laws were broken, is the nub of the Iran-contra controversy. For what if the modern worldwide struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union was not just a difficult and protracted conflict, as the liberal and moderate mainstream of American anticommunism always recognized, but something far, far graver and more perilous? What if the cold war was every bit as desperate, as chancy, as fateful as the Civil War and World War II, and differed from these earlier challenges only because it went on for forty years, which had the effect of lulling the naive and the foolish into a narcotic complacency? If that was the case, wouldn't the modern presidents be justified in discreetly stretching the Constitution exactly as Lincoln and Roosevelt did, in order to get around the naive and the foolish, not to mention the communist traitors who abound on every side?

This, in fact, was the Reaganite argument, though few people want to state it out loud because they don't want to admit to any stretchings. Yet stating it serves a purpose. It allows us to notice that Iran-contra, for all that it reflects the kind of long institutional degeneration that Draper and other writers point out, reflects still more a political split that lasted the entire period from Truman to Reagan. It is the split between the desperado wing of American anti-communism and all other political tendencies.

We can see today that all three of the major constitutional crises of the modern era (McCarthyism, Watergate, and Iran-contra—a major crisis being one that gets broadcast live over non-cable TV) pitted this wing in different ways against the nation as a whole. For throughout this time the desperado faction considered that the republic *was* gravely in danger, and emergency improvisations *were* in order, and they alone, the zealots, could save the country, even if the poor dumb rest of us never understood the scale of the menace or the need for action. The rush to take the hardest possible line was so great that even in the Reagan White House, officials at the highest level worried, as McFarlane has explained, about being called "some kind of commie" by people with a still harder line. And although the partisans of this hardest possible line may not exactly condone, in retrospect, breaking the law or damaging the Constitution or doing anything else to subvert democracy à la Iran-contra, neither do they feel terribly upset about what happened. For emergency measures must be judged by their results, no?

What *were* the results of Iran-contra? The Iran half, which was the lesser part, succeeded in liberating three American hostages, at a price of several hundred TOW missiles or Hawk missile parts per person, which was marvelous for the three individuals. Meanwhile, though, still other Americans were kidnapped in the course of the negotiations, thereby suggesting the classic problem in agreeing to pay any ransom at all. Beyond that, the Iran conspirings were not exactly designed to accomplish the warming in Iranian-American relations that was said to be one of their purposes, given the predictable Iranian reaction upon learning that the American products were sold to Iran at markups that soared toward a thievish 600 percent. As North said: "I lied every time I met the Iranians." And as Rafsanjani reasonably remarked: "Our suspicion was that the Americans were engaged in deceit." The lying, deceitful Americans were none too good at listening, either. The Iranians kept adding to their demands, and one of the new demands, repeated several times, was for America to get rid of Iran's unpleasant neighbor Saddam Hussein; and the wiseguy Americans kept repeating to themselves that the fanatical Iranians were unsophisticated people who knew nothing and understood less. Hah!

The Central American side of North's activities was much bigger, of course, and it is here, due to the defeat of the Sandinistas, that a sense of Iran-contra satisfaction reigns more serenely among some of the partisans of cold war zealotry. A conventional wisdom has arisen about the contras, according to which the contra war and Oscar Arias's Central American peace initiative (which produced the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas), instead of being at odds with one another, worked in tandem. The Sandinistas agreed to Arias's demands because they had been weakened by the contras, and were afraid of having to face further war. And if this is true, and if the 1984 Boland Amendment would, by crippling the contras, have allowed the Sandinistas to brush off Arias's democratic proposals two or three years later, and if defeating the Sandinistas was indeed of paramount importance to the United States—if those several ifs have any weight, then wasn't North justified in his Central American activities? Wasn't he justified even if, rube that he was, Factor EbAAb-SaM dogged his every step? Or if he wasn't entirely justified, weren't his actions at least excusable?

The logic is irrefutable. It is only the assumptions that are not. For instance, is it true that the contras were crucial in bringing the Sandinistas down? From the standpoint of international sympathy and aid, contra attacks were a tremendous boon to the Sandinistas, who kept on benefitting years after democrats around the world would otherwise have washed their hands of the Sandinista Front. Even within Nicaragua, where the contras enjoyed more support than was sometimes recognized, the political effects of the war did not work against the Sandinistas in every respect. The Sandinista People's Army, far from being a weak link in Sandinismo's chain of institutions, was the revolution's pride and joy. It was the single large area in which Sandinismo succeeded in bringing efficiency, technological sophistication, punctuality, and modernity to Nicaragua. The army stirred up a lot of fear and hatred and committed quite a few crimes and massacres; but for a good many people, it was one of the only San-

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dinista efforts that, judged on facts and not just on rhetoric, also aroused pride. And, of course, the Sandinista People's Army had no trouble defeating the contras militarily.

The Sandinistas were brought down the same way that communists were brought down in Europe and elsewhere: not through exterior assault, but through interior contradiction. Communism is a failed alternative road to modernity. Its moment of weakness arrives when, for political reasons or maybe out of exhaustion, critics can no longer be prevented from pointing out the failure. Conservative peasants are hardly in a position to make such a point. Nowhere on earth, not even in Afghanistan, have peasant movements or armies succeeded in fully overthrowing a sturdy communist government. The truly powerful challenges, when they come, are offered by people who may not own a single gun, but who can convincingly claim to be more up-to-date than the communists, not less; more scientific and sophisticated, not less; better educated, more worldly, not less. Faced with people like that, communists are perplexed, and their perplexity is fatal.

The Iran-contra masterminds never seem to have understood this—perhaps because, to understand communism's weakness, you have to acknowledge that communists may be seriously interested in ideas and ideals, which might sound excessively commie for some tastes. Casey, who was no kind of commie, hadn't the slightest understanding of the dynamics at work in Central America. When he learned that the Iran-contra doings were about to be announced to the world at large, he pleaded with Donald Regan, the White House chief of staff, to stop and think. He wanted Regan, in Draper's summary, "to consider the possible consequences of making the scandal public—no more funds to the contras, Central America poisoned by the Sandinistas, Arab outrage over the Israeli role, Iranian wrath at having been overcharged for the missiles." Casey was right, of course, about no more funds to the contras. But he was wrong about Central America. Defunding the contras did not guarantee a Sandinista triumph. It guaranteed a Sandinista defeat.

For without the contras to play to their strengths, the Sandinistas were suddenly vulnerable to the challenges that played to their own inner contradictions—the challenge to their claim to be modern, to bring Nicaragua forward into civilization, to be peacemakers, law-bringers, prosperity-makers, justice-bringers. That challenge could probably have been mounted years earlier, perhaps in 1984,

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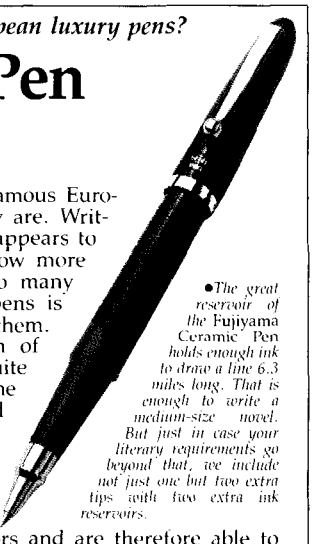

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if the contra policy hadn't stood in the way. Even when the civic challenge did get mounted, the aftereffects of the contra policy continued to put up obstacles, given that America's embassy in Managua had lured into exile every possible Nicaraguan with a talent for politics. Still, the crucial leader did arise. He was Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, the *bête noir* of the Reagan White House (something which is now forgotten) because of his pacifist and social democratic (read: commie) tendencies.

Arias was the bearer of the democratic ideal. He was the unarmed man who could defeat the local version of communism because his ideas were more modern, not less, and because his hands were clean. Once the contras were more or less finished as a military threat, his challenge became irresistible. It was because the Sandinistas needed to secure the kind of worldwide economic support that was previously guaranteed by the sympathy arising from American hostility, but that now could be won only by democratic certification. And it was because the Sandinistas, like communists elsewhere at the end of the 1980s, or perhaps even more than communists elsewhere, were unsure of their own doctrine and had no automatic way to respond to the demand for a genuine election, Costa Rican-style.

The contra policy was not Arias's secret helper, it was his opponent. It wasn't a delayed success, it was a delaying tragedy. And it's worth noting that the spill from this tragedy seeped into waters well beyond Nicaragua. Neither Draper nor Toobin devotes much attention to the Panamanian side of the contra policy—to the rewards that came to Noriega for his loyal cooperation, even if he did misbehave himself in the regrettable affair of the *Pia Vesta* and ninety-nine other instances. Yet the White House preference for a Noriega over an Arias was central to the contra policy. And this preference had its price: by the time that Washington lost patience and realized that something had to change in Panama, the general had benefitted sufficiently from past support to be sitting pretty, while the White House, due to the scandal, was sitting otherwise. Bush, in the course of his presidential campaign, might have been able to strike a deal with Noriega, but the air was so fetid by then with Iran-contra nastiness, the potential damage to Bush's standing was so great, that the White House's room to maneuver shriveled to nothing, and deal-making was out of the question (except from the point of view of the national interest).

The balance sheet of the Iran-contra affair, then, is very striking: on the Iran side of the hyphen, in the Persian Gulf, the United States soon enough found itself in a big-time war, not because of the Iran-contra dealings, but because of the foolishness that underlay those dealings and the larger policy in the Gulf. And on the Nicaragua side of the hyphen, in the zone where contras were the central issue, the United States was in a small-time war, in the invasion of December 1989. If war is the exclamation mark that signals an utterly failed policy, then it can be said with absolute assurance that Iran-contra might be better called Gulf-Panama, and identified as the mother of fiascoes. And it is a sign of the weakness of the legal or constitutional approach that, in discussions of the affair, the hyphen between scandal and war on two continents somehow disappears, and the talk wanders into a forest of statutes, memos, and depositions, and rarely is there an indication that anything more is at issue.

The legal and the constitutional approach to Iran-contra is part of a larger tendency in modern liberalism, which is to descend ever deeper into an obsession with procedure, until finally a candidate like Michael Dukakis might reply to Bush's campaign blather about flags and the Pledge of Allegiance by invoking court rulings in Massachusetts. This descent has been a disaster for liberalism. Let us wring our hands, and then hang the lawyers.

But there is one point to be made in its favor. At issue in Iran-contra were two versions of American patriotism. In addition to their scary theories of the Soviet menace and how to counter it, the White House crazies (as James Baker called them, according to Michael Deaver) entertained their own special notion of political authority. This was the idea that the president by himself holds the *real* authority, king-like, and that legislation offered by dubious congressmen from socialist countries like Massachusetts is a kind of intrusion, and that service to the commander-in-chief constitutes patriotism's highest duty. This idea went beyond being a simple military misunderstanding of politics under a democracy. It became a positive ideal, with intellectual backing from some neoconservative theorists, too. It generated the kind of patriotic exaltation that could lead a Marine colonel not only to click his heels but (far more alarming) to moisten his eyes. And the effect of this idea was to sprinkle across the Iran-contra affair a faint scent of militarism, the sort of thing that cropped up in the Dreyfus Affair in France but has never appeared in any of the other constitutional crises in American history. Draper conjures the atmosphere very well by applying the word "junta," evocative of colonels waving from balconies and threatening to rescue the nation.

What is the proper democratic response to that style of heel-clicking rightism (apart from ducking under the table)? The legal and the constitutional approach, which is too narrow to work up a proper political analysis, may seem still less capable of working up any kind of emotion on behalf of democracy. Nothing makes the heart sag so quickly as the spectacle of a lawyer reaching into his briefcase. Yet at the bottom of that briefcase, there may be, even so, something of interest. Toobin makes clear in his memoir that patriotism was a conscious motive of the prosecutors, and the force of that motive was such that, when he heard about North's jury in Washington breaking into a solemn chorus of "God Bless America" on their way to deliver the guilty verdict, he was moved by the beauty and rightness of the act, and he started to cry.

Draper's book offers nothing so simple or attractively naive. But then Draper is in every way Toobin's opposite. Toobin has a young man's voice, Draper an old man's; Toobin is playful and amusing, Draper is austere. His book is alternately fascinating and unbearably tedious. He tells every anecdote in as many versions as he has discovered among the 50,000 document pages. He almost never looks up from the tiny details to describe a long-distance vista, never glances sideways even far enough to describe the rest of North's policy in Central America. His only purpose is to go through the affair in a spirit of thoroughness, to be rigorous about the different versions, to be factual, to adhere to a historian's discipline.

Indignation drives Draper forward. And as he slowly reconstructs the doings of the errant White House, as he documents scene by scene the decision to undo a series of congressional acts, to undermine the nation's policy on kidnapping, to set up alternative bureaucracies unanswerable to law, as he goes about describing the meetings in Frankfurt or London, the Saudi financiers, foolish Israelis (and the effort to put the blame on Israel), the incompetent colonels, the irresponsibility of it all, the idiocy, the wigs, the pseudonyms, the cake, the Bible, the lies—his indignation slowly congeals into something dense and heavy. It is a gavel, and down it comes with a 700-page bang. Order in the republic!

There are no tableaux of patriotic symbols, no songs, no clicking of heels. Still,

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Draper's methodical approach conjures a spirit, an ideal, that is very powerful. Rigor, thoroughness, factualness, and intellectual discipline are not, after all, merely a historian's skills, or a lawyer's. They have to do with antique notions of character, of republican virtue, which is something that normally can't even be discussed, except perhaps obliquely through the wooden language of law. But these traits do exist (or there will only be a plebiscitory populism). They do arouse, they can arouse (at least they better), a stronger feeling than is aroused by heel-clicking colonels. It's just that these traits were not exactly in fashion during the Age of Reagan, nor did they pop up very prominently in the House and Senate hearings, though there were some nice speeches. They are evident, however, in Draper's massive deed of citizen responsibility, and the effect is strangely moving.

PAUL BERMAN writes for *The Village Voice* and other journals.

The Seer of Prague

BY RICHARD RORTY

Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings
edited, translated, with an introduction by Erazim Kohák
(University of Chicago, 386 pp., $55, $21.95 paper)

Essais hérétiques: sur la philosophie de l'histoire
by Jan Patočka
(Editions Verdier, 173 pp., Fr 78)

Platon et l'Europe:
séminaire privé du semestre d'été 1973
by Jan Patočka
(Editions Verdier, 316 pp., Fr 125)

In his address to a joint session of Congress last year, Václav Havel baffled his audience by turning philosophical. "Consciousness precedes Being," he said, "and not the other way around, as the Marxists claim." Neither our politicians nor our journalists are at ease with such topics. Nor are most of our philosophy professors. Such talk comes naturally, however, to Central European intellectuals, among whom an ignorance of the history of philosophy is still seen as a disability. Philosophers whom everybody in that part of the world is supposed to know a little about—Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger—talked a lot about Consciousness and Being.

Until recently Central Europeans also had to know a lot about Marx, whether they wanted to or not. Marx said, famously, that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness." By "the conditions of existence" he meant the "base," or the economic arrangements of a particular historical period, as opposed to the epiphenomenal "superstructure." So Havel's reversal of the precedence of Being to Consciousness amounted to saying that at least some of what Marx thought superstructural—including our sense of being under unconditional moral obligations—cannot be explained in terms of socioeconomic pressures. Havel went on to speak of "respect for the order of Being, where all our actions are indelibly recorded and where, and only where, they will be properly judged." "The interpreter or mediator," he continued, "between us and this higher authority is what is traditionally referred to as the human conscience."

Havel and his friends spent decades resisting the suggestion that their protests against thuggish brutality and corruption were just examples of "petty-bourgeois thinking." So they needed to resist the claim that one's conscience is a contingent product of history. Hegel, and later Marx, had advanced such a thesis against the Kantian insistence that conscience is our link with something ahistorical, non-natural, non-contingent. If only because History seemed, between 1938 and 1989, to be on the wrong side, it was natural for the dissidents of Prague to question Hegelian relativity and to hope for Kantian absoluteness.

That is one reason why many young Czechs and Slovaks turned, in the '60s and '70s, to Jan Patočka, a philosopher who made no pretense of taking Marxism seriously. As a consequence of his quiet independence, Patočka lost his university position, and resorted to holding private seminars in his living room. A whole generation of Czech intellectuals who were turned out of their jobs after 1968 took Patočka as their model. Prague was filled with philosopher-window cleaners and philosopher-janitors (one of whom kept brooms, mops, and buckets at one end of his room and shelves full of Plotinus, whom he was translating into Czech, at the other end).

Patočka started out as a student of Husserl. Like most other intellectuals in Europe, however, he came under the influence of Heidegger. In an essay written in 1936, Patočka wrote that Thomas Masaryk (Czechoslovakia's Jefferson *and* Washington, the ex-blacksmith and ex-philosophy professor who was the country's inventor and first president) agreed with Husserl that "European humanity is passing through a protracted spiritual crisis whose roots must be sought deep in the past, at the very beginnings of modern thought." At that time Patočka thought that Husserl had correctly diagnosed this crisis as the consequence of "mixing subjectivism with the methodological objectivism of modern natural science." But in 1946 Heidegger began to publish his own account, much more radical than Husserl's, of the connection between the present situation and the beginnings of European thought; and that account forms the background of Patočka's later thought, and of much other postwar European philosophical writing.

Heidegger claimed that the technologism and the scientism of modern times, and especially Nietzsche's exaltation of the Will to Power, were the outcome of Plato's metaphysics of Ideas. These misfortunes were the ironic but inevitable consequences of Plato's attempt to justify Socrates by an appeal beyond time, history, and power. For Heidegger, the crisis of Europe was the result of Platonism being forced, by its own internal strains, to turn into its opposite—into the technocratic nihilism that he, Husserl, Masaryk, and Patočka all saw as a threat to the modern world. Heidegger saw the his-

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tory of the West as the history of what he called "metaphysics," which was the attempt to master Being by identifying it with some particular sort of being (a Platonic Idea; an Omnipotent Father in Heaven; a True, Inner, Rational Self).

Much of Patočka's later writing consists of reactions to Heidegger's story about Platonism and its fate. So it was natural for Havel, who describes himself as having written "a philosophical book" when he was 13, and as "hungrily devouring" Patočka's writings in his 20s, to have published translations of Heidegger in *Tvar*, the monthly that he helped to edit in his 30s. And in the early 1980s, when Havel was subjected to the whims of a sadistic prison warden and tried to stay sane by writing long letters to his wife, it was natural that those letters should take the form of what he called "Heideggerian meditations."

It was equally natural that when Havel was looking for a spokesman for Charta 77, he should turn to the 69-year-old, hitherto unpolitical Patočka. By accepting that role, and by serving as a courier carrying Chartist literature and messages around Prague, Patočka was inviting brutal treatment from the police. Three months after the publication of the Charter, on March 13, 1977, he died of a brain hemorrhage while being interrogated. As Roman Jakobson reported in these pages at the time, the police surrounded the cortege at the funeral, arrested some of the mourners at his graveside, and prevented the family from holding a memorial service.

The manner of Patočka's death, the tone and the circumstances of his writing, the precedent of Masaryk, and the political role played by his students and friends, combine to make Patočka into an emblematic figure. It is as hard to separate what he wrote from the story of his life, or from the story of Czechoslovakia, as to separate what Socrates said from his death, or from the role of that death in the West's self-image. Patočka summed up his own conception of that role when he wrote that "history is a judgment carried out on those who judged Socrates."

These three books make clear that Patočka wanted to do justice both to the urge for unconditionality that Husserl shared with Plato and Kant and to the sense of historical relativity that Heidegger shared with Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. Erazim Kohák, an original philosopher in his own right and the author of the remarkable *The Embers and the Stars*, as well as Patočka's devoted English translator, rightly locates "Patočka's most immediate significance" in his role as "the interpreter of the dialogue between Husserl and Heidegger"—a dialogue that is, Kohák says, "as central to contemporary thought as the dialogue between Kant and Hegel was to the nineteenth century."

Patočka thought that both Husserl and Heidegger get Plato slightly wrong—that Plato is not really, or at least not simply, a metaphysician, despite his *Theory of Ideas; that he did not propound* a doctrine about the nature of Being, and was not in search of the "scientific certainty" upon which Husserl had insisted and which Heidegger had mocked. Patočka agrees with Heidegger that "Being is not a being," and that any attempt to turn Being into an object, any attempt to identify it with some special sort of thing, will fail. "Metaphysics," he says, "wanted to be a science of the absolute object, but because of its very will to the absolute and will to objectivity it reached no object at all." But Patočka believed that Plato knew this, and that Heidegger picked up Plato's Theory of Ideas by the wrong handle, insofar as he treated it as an attempt to make Being into an object, rather than to explain why we should not try to objectify Being. The Platonic Idea of the Good, Patočka says, "is the only nonreality that cannot be explained as a construct of mere realities. It is not an object of contemplation because it is not an object at all."

In other words, Patočka thinks that Plato would have agreed that it is the journey, not the arrival, that matters. "All experience is an arch where-through / Gleams that untraveled world whose margin fades / Forever and forever when I move." So is all philosophizing. "The care of the soul," writes Patočka, "is the search for the good," but the caring and the searching are what matters, not getting the Good right. The philosopher is not concerned with something that could, once and for all, be gotten right. "The only thing philosophy can do and the thing that only philosophy can do," Patočka says, "is to lay out the project of a community where one will do wrong neither to the philosopher nor to anyone else, a harmonious and happy community."

This connection between philosophy and the ideally free and happy community is in the air when Patočka identifies the experience of transcendence ("the experience of dissatisfaction with the given and sensory, intensified by the growing awareness that the given and sensory is neither all there is nor definitive") with the experience of freedom. We can see that identification as equivalent to Havel's insistence that "Consciousness precedes Being," when this pronouncement is interpreted to mean that no understanding of the historical causes of dissent from a particular situation can invalidate that dissent. No reductive account of our sense of moral obligation can be accepted. More specifically: no analysis of the call of conscience—of the call to act in the name of a freer and happier human community—as "a relic of bourgeois thinking" or "a remnant of metaphysics" or "technical thinking" or "logocentric" can justify our rejection of such a call. No claim to "understand the movement of history" can dismiss a proposal for a new future.

Havel ended his address to Congress by calling Jefferson's words about "the consent of the governed" in the Declaration "a simple and important act of the human spirit," and saying: "History has accelerated. I believe that once again it will be the human mind that will notice this acceleration, give it a name, and transform those words into deeds." I take his point to be that what the Founding Fathers did in 1776, and what the Central European nations did in 1989, was to stake their lives on mere hope, as opposed to anything remotely like knowledge—scientific, philosophical, or any other kind.

The Patočkan version of Havel's claim that "hope is not prognostication" is that we should not read Plato as promising that, if we care for our souls properly, we shall win through to Absolute Knowledge, and sail into an anchorage beyond all receding horizons and fading margins. Plato is saying, instead, that we shall never know enough about the past to prognosticate about the future, never understand ourselves or the world or Being so well as to make hope for transformation groundless, never get past trial-and-error to certainty—and that these inabilities not only do not matter, but are essential to our humanity. Our dignity does not come from being potentially in touch with the infinite, it comes from our finitude.

In a manuscript written in 1953 called "Negative Platonism," Patočka says that Socrates's claim that he knew only that he knew nothing was a way of expressing "one of the fundamental contradictions of being human: [the contradiction] between the relation to the whole, intrinsic to humans, and the inability, the impossibility of expressing this relation in the form of an ordinary finite knowledge." This contradiction seems to have been Patočka's central theme. He refused to offer a theoretical resolution of it, insisting that it could be resolved only by living the sort of life that Socrates lived—a life that alternates between, and somehow balances, the hope to transcend the

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world and "a return to the cave," a reimmersion in the sociopolitical situation of one's time.

In the dialogue between Husserl and Heidegger, then, Patočka is mostly on Heidegger's side. It was precisely Husserl's insistence that philosophy should be a "strict science," a way of getting apodeictic truth, that Heidegger rejected, and that led him to lump Husserlian phenomenology with pragmatism and Marxism. All three philosophical movements, Heidegger maintained, are "metaphysical" in the sense that they take philosophy to be a way of getting power rather than as a letting go of the desire for power, a way of mastering one's time rather than a way of freeing oneself from the need for mastery.

Patočka and Heidegger agree that the metaphysician's desire for empowerment, although inevitable because it "rest[s] on the foundation of authentic experience" (what Patočka called "the experience of freedom" and Heidegger "the call of Being"), is self-contradictory: metaphysics is an impossible project. It is the attempt to capture describability itself in a way that is somehow neutral between all alternative descriptions, to describe what Patočka calls "apparition itself" in a way that is neutral between various appearances, to speak in a way neutral between all ways of speaking. It is the impossible attempt to make transcendence concrete, to put freedom in a fixed context. Patočka says that his own version of Platonism—"negative Platonism"—is "rich because it preserves to humans one of their essential possibilities, philosophy purified of metaphysical claims."

The difference between the two thinkers becomes clear, however, when we remember that Heidegger, once he had given up on the Nazis, no longer had any political hope, and certainly none for freer and happier communities. The very idea of taking human happiness and social harmony as a goal repelled Heidegger. The only sort of freedom that interested him was the freedom of which only a tiny number of human beings, the thinkers and the poets, are capable. Heidegger had gone back into the cave once, but he did not like what he saw; and he had no intention of going back again. Whatever "thinking Being" was for Heidegger in his final years, it had nothing whatever to do with preferring one form of government to another. Rather, it had to do with the recognition that there had been nothing to the history of the West save the history of metaphysics—and realizing that the West, too, was therefore an impossible project. Only something unimaginably *unlike* the West, he thought, was a suitable object of hope.

To put the difference between the two men in its simplest terms, Patočka was a philosopher of groundless hope and Heidegger a philosopher of grounded hopelessness. Heidegger found the difference between democracy and tyranny philosophically uninteresting, insignificant compared to the titanic drama of the self-destruction of metaphysics. Patočka threw himself, as soon as he was asked, into what turned out to be a mortal struggle for democratic freedom. In the end, then, Heidegger succumbed to the same temptation that overcame Marx: the temptation to substitute prognostication for hope.

It would be misleading, however, to think of Patočka as a philosopher of democracy and human rights, if this means the sort of philosopher who wants to give democratic institutions and hopes a "firm philosophical foundation." If you reject metaphysics, you reject foundations. If you reject "positive" Platonism, you reject the idea that there are "out there," waiting to be known, such objects as "the moral law" and "human rights." Non-metaphysicians cannot say that democratic institutions reflect a moral reality and that tyrannical regimes do not reflect one, that tyrannies get something wrong that democratic societies get right. Even though he is utterly committed to the political vision of the Enlightenment that Heidegger mocked, Patočka is as little an Enlightenment rationalist as Heidegger. Patočka's conscience led him to do the right thing, but he did not supply good philosophical reasons for doing what he did. At most he gave reasons for doubting that there were good philosophical reasons *against* doing what he did.

To many people, this will seem not enough. Straussians like Allan Bloom, and analytic philosophers who pride themselves on what they call "moral realism," insist on metaphysical foundations for political choice. Such people require that the philosopher answer the question posed by Thrasymachus, the cynical young fascist of Plato's *Republic*: Does justice pay? They require the philosopher to reply: "Yes, appearances to the contrary, it does. For things are not what they seem. There is a non-hedonic reality behind the hedonic appearances. I can *prove* to you that there is, and give you an accurate description of that reality. You disregard that reality at your peril."

Though Patočka was willing to say, in his defenses of Charta 77, that moral principles have "unconditional valid-

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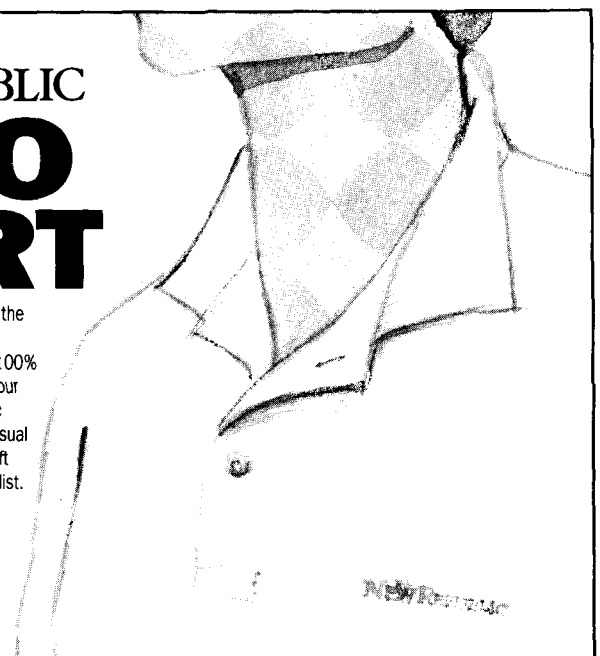

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Fin de Siècle

Impossible to read a paragraph
These days and not to stumble over some
Reference to imminent millennium:

Sensation less of drowning than of draining.
Not one of us who wash around the sluice
But feels the suction. In a recent letter

F. writes of having "finally turned the corner
Into the postmodern," and I picture
A brisk back being turned upon a life

Left stranded on that corner ever after.
Future was once horizon; now it's angle
(Cavafy's angle to the universe,

Said Forster). People also speak of cusps:
Peaks, monstrous teeth or moons or mountain ranges.
Near you I sense no draining,

No corner turned, climacteric, finale,
No grandiose gesturings toward 2000.
It's January; and a few green leaves

Shadow your light eyes like the hope of summer,
A picnic at the swimming hole, a walk
Among wildflowers at the quarry's edge.

Passage

Tracking what is mortal, we forsake
the past, keep chugging in
our children's foamy wake,
snatch at sleep,
grumble at Time's
appalling leakage from the hourglass.

Rhyming relentless chronicles of loss
(love sent us here and back
to love we hope to go)
provides no
barricade
beyond the fortress of a lamplit room

nor is there any haven except sleep
against the outer dark-
ness into which we plunge
nightly, that
never lasts:
comes the miraculous renewal, dawn.

Over the bleak debris of cancelled things—
diminishing, erased
in each passenger's wake—
one breath's blown
at the abyss.
A thin song rises to the lips like air.

Frieze Advancing

Whether the moving figure keeps both hands
concealed beneath the folds of drapery
or briefly stretches one long finger out
(gesture both hard to read and quickly over),
to misconstrue the meaning spells disaster.
Should I step forth as to reciprocate
conjectured greetings from a formal face
already turning, wholly turned away,
or block the onward path by kneeling down
in homage, or, a more ingenious thought,
twitch that stately progress to a halt
by grasping at the corner of the cloak?
Fugitive gleams of recognition jell
into a brisk admonitory wave,
or an abrupter flapping, chopping motion.
But does it warn or beckon?
Does it mean "come closer" or "keep off"?
Cautiously construing any sudden
gesture as camouflage, I keep my distance
only to notice how I've stumbled in
between the cracks of limit. As I watch,
the figure moves along what now appears
a predetermined path with steady pace.
But what such onward motion signifies
is eloquently wrapped in reticence.
These even footfalls, this steadfast refusal
of any least temptation to look back:
stoicism or stolidity
grapple as motives with a silent fierce
glee at the achievement of escape.

Six of One

To know the difference between full and empty
doesn't get easier. Take menstruation—
fullness a falling follows.
Or take the long-illegible sonata
slanting at last like lightning through a screen
but also herald to the lash of rain.
So late acknowledgement and so desire
painted my face.

There was a corridor
smelling of paint. Walk down it to the end.
Open the door. Enter the empty room.
But then it seemed I was the empty one—
I who had scraped my brainpan gourd-seed dry,
my shining face the pane for light's invasion,
my parchment skin the January mirror.

Rachel Hadas

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ity," and that "no society can function without a moral foundation, without convictions that do not depend on convenience, circumstances, or expected advantage," he was not prepared to give that sort of answer to Thrasymachus. Like Sartre, he can despise fascists, but he cannot refute them. Refutation, Patočka thinks, is not the sort of thing that philosophy is good for. What he calls "the experience of freedom" is not the ability to transcend relativity by answering a'' the cynic's objections, or the ability to achieve certainty that one is doing the right thing. It is a leap in the dark. Without metaphysical backup, the unconditional call of conscience can only be a call to make such a leap.

This point has been obscured by all the recent noise about "absolutism" and "relativism." People who talk in those terms typically run together two senses of "absolute." The first is the sense in which Havel and Patočka thought it unconditionally, absolutely wrong to tell the sort of lies the thugs wanted them to tell. "Absolute" here means something like "such that I can only live with myself if . . . ." To say that one has an absolute obligation, in this first sense, is to say, "Here I stand; I can do no other." In the second sense, however, "absolute" means something like "objectively wrong," where "objectively" has the force of "wrong whether or not you, or anybody else, can see its wrongness—yet you would only *fail* to see its wrongness if your mind were clouded by sin, prejudice, emotion, impure motives, or unfortunate cultural conditioning."

Confusion between these two senses, between absoluteness as unconditional obligation and absoluteness as objective factuality, will arise whenever some metaphysician says that if God, or the Platonic Idea of the Good, or the Essential Nature of Humanity, or the True Self, does not exist—if there is no metaphysical object that stands behind claims about "objective wrongness"—then everything is permitted. To say that is to make metaphysical foundations essential to ethics, to suggest that unless you acknowledge the existence of, and feel yourself swayed by, some such object, you have no business feeling yourself under any unconditional moral obligations.

The anti-metaphysical strain in recent philosophical thought repudiates this suggestion. More generally, it repudiates the Platonic suggestion that only the objective existence of something like the Idea of the Good can make sense of Socrates's life, and give us reason to condemn Socrates's judges. This repudiation is at the heart of the current controversies about Nietzschean and Heideggerian "irrationalism," about the purportedly bad effects of what Derrideans call "phallogocentrism," and about the purportedly liberating effects of "postmodernism." Such a repudiation is the force of the "negative" in Patočka's "negative Platonism." For Patočka, the unconditionality of the call of conscience has nothing to do with the notion of a moral demand being legitimated or underwritten by something factual, something "out there."

It is not clear whether Havel stands with Patočka on this point. Sometimes it looks as if he is unwilling to follow Patočka and Heidegger in putting metaphysics out of its misery. Whereas Patočka explicitly denies that there are such things as metaphysical facts, Havel explicitly says, in one of the *Letters to Olga*, that "collective spirit [i.e., the consensual will of a community] is only the 'physical' preamble to the metaphysical fact I once called 'the order of the spirit.' " In the immediately preceding letter, on the other hand, Havel says that "my meditations are not, nor are they meant to be, a philosophy . . . . They are only (perhaps) an existential document (like poetry), an imprint in progress of the flow of my life, nothing more . . . ."

Moreover, many of the *Letters to Olga* speak of "the order of Being" (or, more frequently, "the horizon of Being") not as an authority, but simply as another name for what we never quite reach, an expression of our realization that everything that we know is not enough to determine what we should choose, that we still lack words for much that we should like to say. These passages suggest that to have a sense of "the order of Being" is not different from what Patočka calls, alternately, "the experience of freedom" and "the experience of transcendence." It may be that Havel is simply using traditional (and inapposite) metaphysical language to describe groundless Patočkan hope, rather agreeing with those who would criticize Patočka for giving an insufficiently absolutist answer to Thrasymachus.

However it may be with Havel's view of the matter, it is useful to ask what importance talking about the relative priority of Being and Consciousness, or raising such issues as positive Platonism versus negative Platonism, or moral realism versus moral antirealism, has for our sense of moral obligation. My own hunch is that it has very little importance. On our side of the English Channel, where neither Marx nor Heidegger has had much of an impact, these topics and issues are neglected. Neither George Orwell, our model of moral decency, nor John Stuart Mill, our paradigmatic moral philosopher, took much interest in them. The prison meditations of a British or an American Havel would use different words, raise different questions. But the sense of being under unconditional moral obligation is equally common on both sides of the Channel, and is excited by the same sort of events.

We English-speaking intellectuals lose little save multicultural literacy and sophistication, I think, by remaining baffled when asked about the relations of Being and Consciousness, or when asked whether we think ethics requires a metaphysical foundation. What makes us all rejoice in the examples set by Patočka and by Havel is as little affected by our view of the relation between our conscience and the order of Being as it is by whether or not we believe in God. What makes us so rejoice is simply the shared belief that people ought to be free to say what they think, not to have to lie or to knuckle under in order to get food and books for their children. That shared belief was what sent a wave of rapturous fellow-feeling around the world in the last months of 1989.

Kant thought that this fellow-feeling, this sense of a shared human dignity, is intrinsic to what he called "rationality." He thought that it is something universal, not dependent upon historical conditions. Hegel, by contrast, thought that it is a product of special historical circumstances, such as the invention of the Christian religion, circumstances that ac-

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counted for its being more common in Europe than elsewhere. As a good historicist, anti-foundationalist, and anti-metaphysician, I think that Hegel was right, that this sense of shared dignity was made rather than found. But I doubt that it matters much, for the purposes that matter most, whether Hegel was right or not. Whichever way the continuing dialogues between Kant and Hegel, or between Husserl and Heidegger, come out, that sense of shared dignity will, with any luck, persist.

Only the philosophical fanatic thinks that human solidarity is imperiled if the wrong account of moral obligation wins, just as only the religious fanatic thinks that one's eternal salvation can be imperiled by picking the wrong sect. Patočka was no fanatic. Still, he gave his heroes, Socrates and Plato, too much credit. He made them more central to the story of Europe, and to that of humanity, than they are. For on Patočka's account, as on Heidegger's, philosophy has "a central position in history." "Since the birth of philosophy," Patočka says, "history is above all the internal history of the-world-as-Being, different from beings and yet belonging to them as the Being of each being." I think that this goes too far. Being has too large a role in Patočka's account of history, and concern and sympathy for suffering too small a role.

Jerusalem should share the credit with Athens for making Europe what it has become. The Christian suggestion that we think of strangers primarily as fellow sufferers, rather than as fellow inquirers into Being, or as fellow carers for the soul, should have a larger role than Patočka gives it. The waves of joy of 1989 cannot plausibly be traced to the sense that judgment had been rendered on Socrates' judges, as opposed to the belief that a lot of people who had been humiliated and shamed would now be able to stand up and to speak. Separating out the roles of Socrates and Christ in the history of Europe is a notoriously tricky business, but surely Patočka oversimplifies things when, like Heidegger, he approvingly quotes Nietzsche's comment that "Christianity is Platonism for the people." Might not a sense that charity and kindness are the central virtues have caught on, and helped make Europe what it became, even if some eager Platonists had not grabbed control of Christian theology?

It may well be true, as Patočka said, that the only useful thing that philosophy can do is to lay out the project of a community that will do justice to Socrates. But surely it is not true, as he went on to say, that philosophy is the *only* thing that can do that. To make the latter claim plausible one has to dilute and to broaden the meaning of "philosophy" until it no longer distinguishes anything from anything else. It is a good idea to remind oneself occasionally, while reading Patočka or Heidegger, that lots of different sorts of people have cooperated in projecting and creating such a community—social workers as well as political economists, preachers as well as poets, playwrights as well as philosophers.

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From Ordure to Order

BY EUGEN WEBER

Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations by Donald Reid

(Harvard University Press, 235 pp., $39.95)

The quest for water, the conquest of water, is one of the great themes of the nineteenth century: commercialization, industrialization, municipalization, statification. Collecting, carrying, distributing, purifying water (washing water, as one contemporary put it) called for colossal investments. Disposing of it once it had been used, along with other waste products, posed challenges just as vast: the more daunting, the greater the scale of the community involved.

In a brief but gutsy book, Donald Reid tackles what Hugo's *Les Misérables* once described as Leviathan's Bowels: the sewers of Paris, the men who made them and those who made them work. In 180 pages of text and nearly 50 pages of notes, Reid carries us from ordure and vile odors to new order. And the first lesson of his work is that urban ecologists should think twice before wishing themselves back in earlier and supposedly more pristine ages.

Urban centers were concentrations of filth and corruption: dung intersected by buildings. Muck encroached on houses, houses stood wedged in muck. Before it became the city of light, and for a while thereafter, Paris was a city of mud, mire, garbage, dust, and grime. In the 1780s, street cleaners removed 270,000 cubic meters of refuse from the city every year, cesspools contributing another 30,000 or so. Little had changed from earlier times, except scale and the coming of "cleaners." Paris had rested on cesspools since the sixteenth century, and cesspools generated miasmas and foul smells—those mephitic odors connected with Mephisto.

Household and kitchen wastes were dumped, along with offal and with excrement, into shallow gutters that ran down the middle of the street. Fetuses formed part of the refuse. As late as the fin de siècle, prefectural circulars repeatedly lectured on the duty of burying embryos. (Since the cheapest funeral in late nineteenth-century France cost the equivalent of about five days' work, fetuses were more often thrown in ditch, gutter, sewer, river, discarded in a public urinal or, after 1900, in Metro corridors.) Streets were flushed by rain or scoured by enterprises interested in selling fertilizer to farms around the capital. The sewers, little more than gullies, turned to torrents in a rainstorm and, well into the nineteenth century, poor men made poor livings by helping their betters find a way across them, or placing planks across the depressions and charging a small fee for their use. Covered or uncovered collector sewers flowed into the Seine. It was to escape the sewer smell of the Seine at the Louvre, near which one major sewer emptied, that King Francis I bought the Tuileries, a bit downstream, where the smell proved only slightly less daunting.

Night soil companies, meanwhile, plumbed the cesspools. The clatter and the clang of soil tubs, the rumbling of their tumbrils, were compared to artillery. The tubs leaked, the heavy carts unsettled houses, stove in store fronts, cracked pavements, disturbed sleepers. But cesspools accounted for only a fraction of the refuse. Through the 1840s, court records reveal householders and servants cited for emptying chamber pots from upper windows, rather than more politely and less provocatively into the gutters. Also through the 1840s, de-

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spite the appearance of public urinals (*pissotières* or *vespasiennes*), males and some women continued to urinate, and sometimes to defecate, in public: in doorways, against hitching posts or houses or statues or churches, even on shopwindows.

All the while, cesspool contents seeped into surrounding soil, contaminating wells and contributing to the laxative virtues of water, while the air reeked of putrid exhalations. As Balzac put it in a novel of 1834 (*La Fille aux yeux d'or*), the houses of the city plunged their feet in rubbish and in filth. Paris, said Fourier's disciple, the engineer Victor Considérant, was a vast workshop of putrefaction. Thirty years later, a cesspool cleaners' strike inspired Flaubert to produce an ode in the scatological vein characteristic of his generation, beginning with a "Crappers' Chorus" and ending with an eruption of cesspools that covers Paris "like Herculaneum under lava."

By the 1860s, however, Flaubert's fantasies were becoming anachronistic. The railway mania of the 1840s was followed in the 1850s by something like a water mania, sparked by fear of epidemics born of miasmas and pollution, and drawing its inspiration from the British. The Second Empire's interest in urban renewal above and below ground made distribution of water and evacuation of waste the order of the day.

England had taken its time. Cesspits had plagued the country for some centuries. In 1844, 53 overflowing cesspits had been discovered under Windsor Castle, accounting for the sore throats and other maladies of its denizens. In 1849, sewers delivered over 9 million cubic feet of sludge into the Thames, where the main London water company's intake lay only feet from the outfall of a major sewer. In that year more than 14,000 died of cholera in the capital (10,000 more succumbed in 1854), and *The Spectator* denounced water companies that delivered "a more or less concentrated solution of native guano." A few years later there would be serious talk of transferring Parliament to another site, where the stench was less. By then, however, a Nuisances Removal Act had been passed (in 1849) and cesspools were being eliminated. By the 1850s their replacement was well under way, and after a new sewer system opened in 1865, London's death rate began to fall decisively.

Reid does not make sufficiently clear that it was London's example that guided Napoleon III and his prefect Haussmann; nor does he insist, as I have done, on the discomforts of what went before. But he makes very clear the Second Empire's innovations (Hugo called them revolutions), which are the gist of the tale he tells. Improvements had begun before 1848: covering open sewers, building more sewer lines, curving their floors to make flushing easier, introducing sluice carts and sluice boats. But sewers continued to overflow into the streets at downpours, and their greatest melioration went with Haussmann's tearing down of Paris in the 1850s and 1860s before he built it up.

Reid lets us know that sanitation was not restricted to sewers. Since 1781, Montfaucon, to the north-east, had been the city's only dump. Before becoming a repository for the capital's garbage, Montfaucon had held its gibbets; executed criminals had been left to rot with other animals amid the swelling heaps of sludge. Slaughterhouses added the odor of rotting carcasses to that of rotting muck. By the 1840s, knacker's yards had produced an enormous reef, fifteen feet deep, of fat white worms watered by an untarrying stream of blood. The roseate maggots were sold to fishermen, and the process of turning refuse to fertilizer made Montfaucon a vast putrid pond. Much of it filtered into the ground, hence into the wells of northern Paris, while north and northeasterly winds carried its stink all over town.

Still, as the Yorkshireman said, where there's muck there's brass. There were those who dreamed of turning the repugnant into profit. Human excrement was held to have prestigious fertilizing powers, the nitrogen in a kilo of urine alleged to produce a kilo of wheat. The carbonized contents of the cess-pool might be turned into deodorant. The fearsome guano gullies might harbor a manufacturing village: *Ammoniapolis.* Not even roses, though, grown in fecal fertilizer and presented to Madame Haussmann, could persuade the persistent prefect to relent. Montfaucon was first closed to knackers and nightsoil men. Then, in the 1860s, it was turned into a public garden: the picturesque park of the Buttes-Chaumont, part of the garland of gardens with which Napoleon III surrounded Paris.

But if Montfaucon speeds Reid's slalom between revulsion and fascination, his attention remains focused on the sewers: revealing, purgative, and inspirational. One of his most original chapters deals with the agricultural use of human waste. We have just glimpsed entrepreneurs and inventors hoping to make a profit from it. Social thinkers and engineers deservedly get more attention. They believed, with Saint-Simon, that technological and social progress went together. Some talked of using putrid fermentation to heat the city, or tapping the ashes of incinerated refuse for fertilizer. But the immediate future lay with those who wanted to recycle waste for irrigation, and even for reconsumption.

In 1842, England's great sanitary reformer Edwin Chadwick recommended the restoration of organic balance between country and town by pumping the water of the one to the other and evacuating urban waste in the opposite direction where, used as fertilizer, it would raise food for cities. Ten years later Pierre Leroux, socialist and utopian, who used his own excrement as fertilizer, proposed what he called the *circulus.* Under Leroux's system, personal dung would replace taxes, agricultural production would double, poverty would disappear, and waste would generate not deadly miasmas but social regeneration. Victor Hugo, who visited Leroux in Jersey, where both had taken refuge from the Second Empire, was going to publicize his theories in *Les Misérables,* where the famous sewer section denounces the millions that Paris literally throws into the water, thinking it is purging the city when it deprives it of its riches.

It was in this spirit that, in 1869, a sewage-irrigated model garden farm was set up by municipal engineers at Gennevilliers. Today the local population tops 50,000. In the 1870s it barely reached 2,000. Wild and isolated, Gennevilliers stood on a bleak plain, in the peninsula created by the loop of the Seine downstream of Clichy and Asnières. The enterprise proved a great success, and an opponent of sewage farming was reduced to arguing that it would produce more vegetables than Paris could consume. In 1878, to French patriotic satisfaction, the Berlin municipal authorities were to abandon chemical purification of sewage in favor of the Gennevilliers system. A year later Jules Verne incorporated filtration and agricultural irrigation by sewage in his portrayal of a model modern city. Even the anarchist Prince Peter Kropotkin was to present Gennevilliers-like truck farming as the basis of healthy cooperation between country and town. Thereafter sewage farms continued to contribute to the supply of Paris markets, until rising land values began to nibble them away. In the 1980s only a couple of thousand hectares were left, still irrigated by sewage.

The Second Empire's sewer system was an engineering triumph, but also a triumph of moral and aesthetic values over barbarism, for a civilized society rests on manners as much as on technology. The engineering problems that sewers represented were matched by psychological ones: fear, disgust, revulsion. Reid refers to the contemporary fascination with the

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world below the surface, home of disruptive forces: the refuse of disorder, the fermentation of rejection and exclusion, liable to surge up at intervals as plagues and revolutions. He reminds us that epidemics went with political eruptions: revolution in 1830 followed by cholera in 1832, revolution in 1848 followed by cholera in 1849. And that Jean Valjean carries Marius through the Paris sewers after the abortive rising of June 1832, year of the cholera. Such associations were not new. Revolution and Restoration had nursed fears of gunpowder plots hatched below ground, as of revolutionaries like Marat and Blanqui who seemed to rise from the same illicit depths. Though revolutionaries found better places in which to hatch their plots, the symbolism of social pathology, the correlation of physical and moral corruption visible in refuse as in crime, remained rooted in the reality of tunnels that served as lair for thieves, robbers, or gangs of urchins and of vagabonds.

The nineteenth century was an age of suffering and stink in which the dominant classes, once inured to both, grew steadily more sensitive. The sensibilities that outlawed cruelty to animals before they marginalized public executions sought to sanitize the underground as well. In the 1850s and 1860s the length of city streets doubled, that of sewers multiplied fivefold. Under Haussmann, improved water supplies expanded street cleaning and the functioning of the sewer system side by side. Water power, displaced from industry by steam, enjoyed its final triumphs in the sewers. There, as above ground, better ventilation brought in fresh air, and an innocuous odor replaced the sickly, nauseous vapors of the 1840s.

Sewers became an abode of modernity. Their tunnels (1,214 kilometers in 1911, 2,100 kilometers in 1985) were going to house water mains, then telegraph and telephone wires, pneumatic tubes for the postal service, eventually the electrical system that governs traffic lights. As the functioning of sub-urban organs was improved, as the criminal underworld was displaced, danger and repugnance gave way to curiosity. Public tours of sewers, still conducted today, began during the Exhibition of 1867. Men in top hats, ladies in high heels and fancy bonnets, riding in chariots and gondolas with cushioned seats, now delved in what had been an untamed world.

But waste disposal had not been licked. The problem had merely been shifted. In the 1870s, still, the contents of the expanded sewer system flowed into the Seine. "From Clichy to Poissy," wrote the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1880, "the river is one vast source of fermentation and infection." The worst occurred at Clichy and Saint-Denis, where every day 450 tons of raw sewage poured downstream, then moved in a stinking black mass, bubbling with gas, hugging the banks, obstructing navigation, even preventing the river from freezing in winter. When used as fill to raise the riverbank around Asnières, the sewage rotted, emitting a foul odor. The pretty river that we visualize from Impressionist paintings was a polluted mess all the way to Meulan and Meudon, 75 and 100 kilometers downstream from Paris. By the mid-1880s, when Seurat painted his bathers at Asnières, the problem was on the way to being solved; but no one, not even Reid, seems to have considered that most Impressionist paintings of these parts cluster round Argenteuil, Chatou, Pontoise, and Bougival because those localities were safely removed from stinking Asnières by a crucial river loop.

The beginning of the end came in the summer of 1880, when an infamous foulness covering Paris mobilized the press and public opinion, pressing for an end of dumping untreated sewage in the Seine. The *cloaca* of Clichy was closed in 1899. One last outbreak of cholera in 1892 was followed in 1894 by legislation compelling householders to hook up with the *tout à l'égout*: direct to sewer drainage. By 1904, most Paris buildings still lacked a connection. By 1910, about 60 percent had installed one, while the suburbs were converting to another British invention: septic tanks. Paris would get sufficient regular water supplies only on the eve of World War I, overall *tout à l'égout* only long after. But the days of the Seine as "an open air sewer" (Parliament, 1885) were over, like those of water companies that made the public pay "to resorb our excrements disguised as drink" (Academy of Medicine, 1884).

It would be rhetorically convenient to end at this point, but that would not do justice to Reid's book. The fact is that about half of it concerns not material problems, but those who faced them: sanitary engineers and, above all, first cesspool cleaners (rowdy, subversive), then sewermen (dedicated, stalwart). Sewermen are Reid's heroes, and he vividly describes the conditions of their rough, hazardous work, their positive public image, their staunch labor politics, solidarities, and self-help efforts. Sewermen founded the first municipal workers' union in 1887, with a very efficient unpaid secretary who kept on working like his fellows. They enjoyed a living wage. They won full sick pay in 1893, a nine-hour work day in 1888, an eight-hour work day in 1899, a six-hour work day in 1936, all well ahead of other trades. They set up a loan fund for their members, organized lecture courses, provided pension supplements for widows and orphans, created a syndical farm colony for orphans and retirees.

Working conditions continued to be difficult: sudden downpours still generated raging torrents, poisonous centipedes, spiders large as the hand, rats big as kittens, swarms of flies. Hazardous waste led to fires, explosions, steam and chemical burns, and a high incidence of pulmonary disease. In this as in other respects, things have changed little since. "Our grandfathers," reports a sewerman in 1977, "did the same operations that we do." This second part of Reid's book represents labor history written with respect and affection. He has given sewers and their servants a worthy monument.

EUGEN WEBER is the author, most recently, of *My France* (Harvard University Press).

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

progressive than in 1977.

Even Mr. McIntyre admits that more than a third of the increased riches of the rich can't be explained by tax cuts. But his hyperbolic statistic encourages Democrats to pretend they can reverse the inequality surge of the '80s by tinkering with the tax code. They can't.

I concede that if you read Mr. Greenstein's report carefully you will come across the fraction (one-sixth) of poor families that have a full-time worker. But the report repeatedly emphasizes misleadingly high figures that include part-time work. For example, the topic sentence of the section in question reads: "Most of the children in poverty in our country are children who are members of working poor families." That's only true, as Mr. Greenstein admits, if you count part-time and occasional workers as "working poor."

Mr. Fersh says nothing to diminish my skepticism of the CCHIP "hunger" survey.

Geography gap

To the editors:

Alan Ehrenhalt got it right in his book *The United States of Ambition: Politicians, Power, and the Pursuit of Office.* Why couldn't James Q. Wilson in his review ("The Government Gap," June 3)? Sioux Falls is in South Dakota, not Iowa. Must one be from the Midwest to be able to verify this geographical fact?

JAMES E. MOORE
Lincoln, Nebraska

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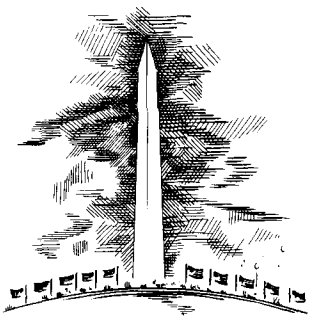
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Myth America

THE TRIBULATIONS OF WOMEN IN the workplace—unequal pay, pink ghettos, sexual harassment, "mommy tracks"—have been grist for countless think tank reports, seminars, and luncheons in recent years. (The subject still hasn't run out of Beltway steam: the latest issue of *U.S. News & World Report* is devoted to "Why Women Can't, Won't, Don't Want to Make It to the Top.") But political economists and policy analysts can now toss their research aside: the fault, according to Naomi Wolf, author of the recently published book *The Beauty Myth*, lies with liposuction. Wolf's tome (which Germaine Greer, author of *The Female Eunuch*, calls the "most important feminist publication since *The Female Eunuch*") argues that male-dominated institutions have perpetuated a Beauty Myth in order to "checkmate power at every level in individual women's lives." According to this doctrine, the patriarchical world order, deeply threatened by the advent of large numbers of females in public and professional life, has forced women to enlarge their breasts, shrink their thighs, lift their faces and rears, dye the hairs on their heads and remove the ones on their toes—all for the approval of their bosses. Because men subject women to a "professional beauty qualification" (PBQ, for short), women are apparently so busy worrying about the right shade of cheekbone enhancer that they're unable to climb the corporate ladder.

WOLF IS RIGHT, OF COURSE, THAT many women suffer disproportionately at the hands of corporate America, and that there are plenty of male employers who want to work only with pretty women. (Three months into my three-month tenure as managing editor of *Success* magazine, the ultimate career manual for men, I was advised by my boss to learn about the corrective powers of make-up.) But I really can't buy the theory that it's all part of some grand conspiracy of the political order. The Beauty Myth, Wolf maintains, is a function of "the need of today's power structure, economy, and culture to mount a counteroffensive against women. . . . An economy that depends on slavery needs to promote images of slaves that 'justify' the institution of slavery." Slavery, of course, is the apposite word. Wolf's view of the problem so perpetuates the idea of women as victims that we end up having almost no autonomy at all. In all 348 pages of her book, Wolf's only tangible advice is for women to become better acquainted with their bodies by engaging in "communal all-female nakedness." I think I'd rather have Molly Yard.

THERE'S NOT MUCH DANGER OF communal all-female nakedness in Washington, except maybe at the Y. More to the point, there's not much evidence here to support any of Wolf's claims about professional women's frantic efforts to appear more sexually alluring to their male superiors. If anything, women seem to be vying with men to see who can appear the more perfect embodiment of brisk, sexless careerism. A couple of years ago Richard Cohen got skewered for a column noting the lack of stylishness in Washington female attire. Unfortunately, he was underreporting the problem. The key fashion accessory here for the past eight years has been the bow tie. Women wear it to hold back their chin-length hair, to secure their buttoned-up collars, to add a bit of flair to their otherwise sensible pumps. Colors of their suits and blouses run from pale pink to beige, designs from buttercup-size flowers to solids; fabrics are generally Perma-press. Anyone who strays from the aesthetically correct formula is liable to get re-education from the regiments of beige. On several occasions my far-from-hip but mildly un-Perma-press clothes have been the object of disapproval. On my daily morning bus ride to the office recently, I was loudly and peremptorily told by a woman with all three bow ties firmly in place that my fishnet stockings made me look like a "tramp." Well, at least I didn't look like a Washingtonian.



IN THE EVENING HOURS A FEW more intrepid souls venture into public wearing something outré. Washington men don't respond well to this. In fact, they seem to find it difficult to restrain their usually well-sedated animal instincts. A recent case in point involves Dr. Burton Lee, President Bush's physician. Dr. Lee, 61 and married, was minding his own business at the White House Correspondents' Dinner when a tall, black, attractive female reporter from *The Washington Post*—suggestively wearing a strapless dress—happened to walk by his table. He had no choice, it seems, but to sweep her onto the table so that, presumably, others could get a better look. "It was such a fleeting thing it didn't even register on me," Dr. Lee explained to *USA Today*. He says he had never met the woman, Donna Britt. "Actually I was more interested in a 6-foot 3-inch blonde who I asked to join our table. If she had . . . I wouldn't have gotten in trouble. But she was surrounded by 42 guys and was taken." Dr. Lee added that the "guys [at the White House] all think it's funny. . . . The women are all concerned that I'll be labeled a bad guy. But it's not going to happen. I had a perfectly good time." Even though the room was choking with reporters, the event never quite reached the stage of turning into a Gary Hart/Chuck Robb/Wilbur Mills-type scandal. Nor did Britt want it to. She told *USA Today*: "I really don't want it to be a big deal." A month later she wrote in the *Post*'s Outlook section that she had suppressed her outrage and wanted Dr. Lee to understand her humiliation. But she ended the piece saying she didn't want *him* to feel humiliated. Perish the thought. It'd be a shame to see such an upstanding member of his profession subjected to such indignity in public.

IT'S NOT HARD TO FIGURE OUT how Thelma and Louise would have disposed of Dr. Lee. In their road trip across the American Southwest, fleeing both their former dreary lives and their new outlaw acts, the title characters of Ridley Scott's new female buddy movie (played by Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon) succeed in offing or otherwise making short work of nearly every male in their way. They blow up a 50-foot oil tanker in the desert, lock a virile policeman in his car trunk, and shoot a prospective rapist through the heart—all so that we can clearly get the message that men are pigs. No doubt there is occasionally a certain porcine quality to some members of the unfairer sex, but there has to be an easier way to reform them than catching them with their pants down and shooting them at point-blank range. Bow ties isn't it. And I still have my doubts that communal all-female nakedness is either, though it would undoubtedly make a killing at the box office.

KAREN LEHRMAN

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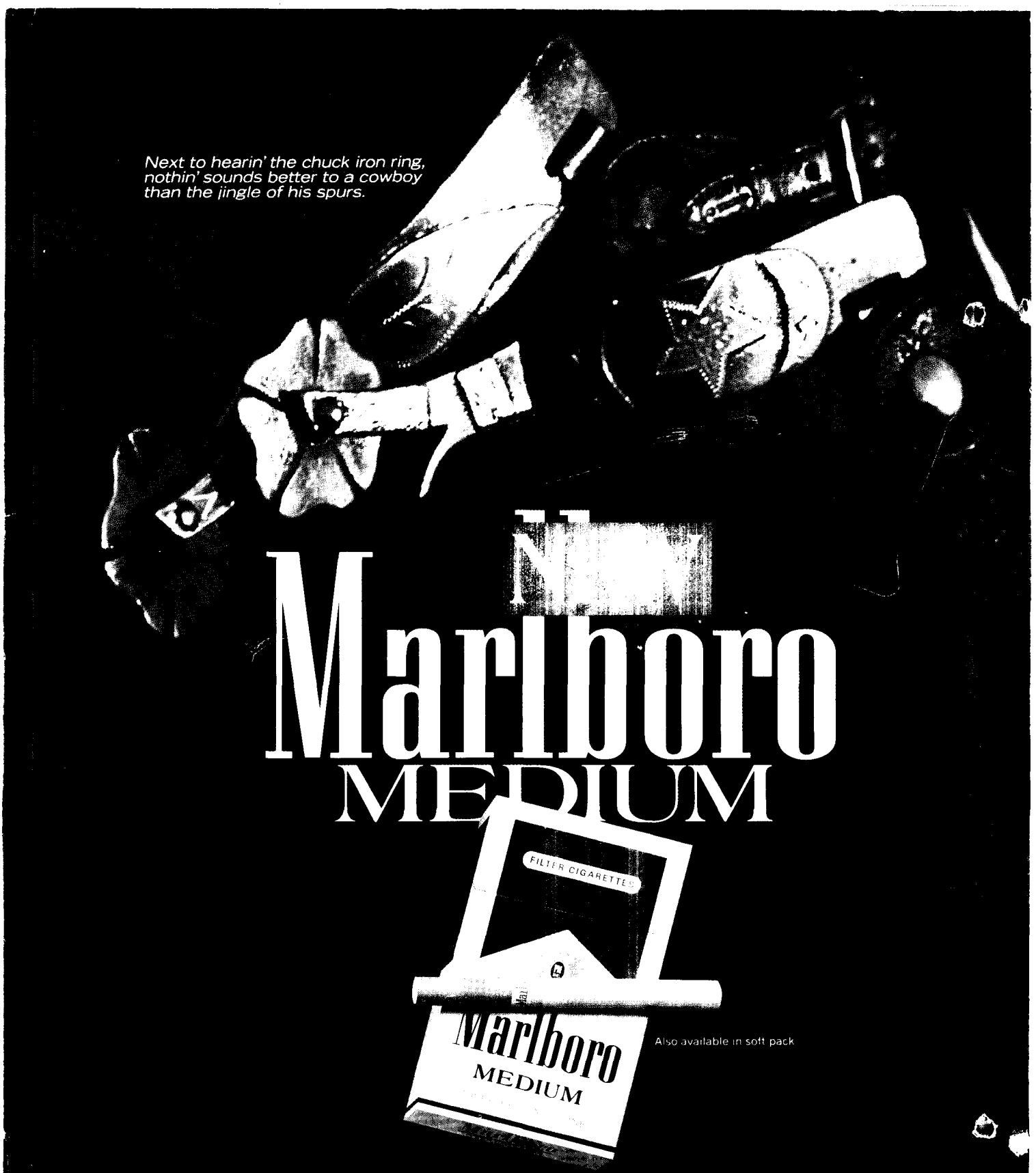
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